

PEG
OF
THE
PRAIRIE

—
MRS.
COULSON
KERNAHAN

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OF THE
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PEG OF THE PRAIRIE



"PEGGY RAN OUT TO MEET HER FATHER."

Page 241

PEG OF THE PRAIRIE

A STORY FOR GIRLS

BY

MRS. COULSON KERNAHAN

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J. ALFRED SHARP

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DEDICATED
TO
MISS A. M. PHILLIPS
WHO FIRST SUGGESTED TO ME
THE IDEA OF
WRITING A BOOK FOR GIRLS

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PEG OF THE PRAIRIE

CHAPTER I

IN THE SOD STABLE

'GUESS you'll wish yourself back here, Peg, before you've been a month with our fine relations!'

The speaker was a well-grown boy of sixteen, and his remark was addressed to his sister, a lanky but pretty girl of fourteen, who was at the moment balancing herself on the edge of a manger, avoiding, with a cleverness that told of long practice, the horns of a cow.

The cow's head was very near to her, and from time to time tossed hay into her lap—prairie hay, which is pungent with the odours of wild peppermint. The girl's grey eyes, which were shadowed by long black eyelashes, were shining and funlit, a fact her brother observed despite the feebleness of illumination afforded by the hanging stable-

lamp. The sight did not please him. He repeated his remark as he prodded the floor with a pitchfork, on which he had been carrying hay for the cows.

'Guess you'll wish yourself back here before you've been a month with our fine relations!'

The girl tossed a long plait of dark brown hair over her shoulder impatiently as she answered, 'Will I, though?'

'You sure will!' he retorted. 'Stay right here, Peg. Canada's God's own country.' His voice was pleading, but not so pleading as his eyes.

The girl sprang down from the manger and squeezed herself between the cow and the poplar-pole barrier, to reach her brother, and to put two arms about his neck. 'Guess I'll want you in the worst way when I'm in England, Jo--and mother and father--but--'

'But what?' he asked gloomily.

'You see,' she began hesitatingly, as she picked a scrap of hay from her brother's overalls, 'you see, I do so want to see something that isn't prairie, and Uncle Wilham has a fine house, and a motor-car, and Millicent and Fanny have such lovely, lovely clothes in the photographs, and--'

'Oh, Peg!' the boy broke out reproachfully.

'I can't help it, Jo!' the girl cried, as she glanced round the vast expanse of gloomy sod stable with disgust. 'I do want to wear pretty clothes, and not to have to milk cows and make butter.'

The horses were stamping in their end of the stable, as a hint to Jo that he had not yet given them their oats.

'Besides,' went on Peg, 'mother and dad want me to go. They said it would not be fair not to give me a chance, since uncle and aunt want me.'

'You would sure have nice frocks here if dad hadn't been so unlucky,' the boy reminded her. 'What with the loss of two harvests and the blizzard killing off stock, to say nothing of that swamp-fever that did for some of the best horses, dad has been right up against it.'

Peggy flashed an injured glance at her brother as she retorted, 'You sure don't need to be telling me all that! It sounds as if you don't think I care! Oh, Jo! I do care! but——'

'There is always a "but,"' said the boy a little bitterly.

'I believe you think me selfish to want to

go to England,' Peggy told him resentfully. His tone changed.

'It is not that, Peg,' he said gently. 'It is natural you should want to go—and get your chance, and take what is coming to you. Maybe it's me that's selfish. I shall miss you so!'

'I'll be coming back, Jo,' she reminded him. 'They only ask me for a year's visit, and to stay on after if I like it. Of course I shall come back; and why do you set up a kick now, anyway? It is only February, and I don't go to the old country till May. Guess you'd best finish feeding-up. Lucky we've plenty of oats to feed the horses! Hark at old Min stamping!'

The boy moved away among the shadows, the girl following him with eyes in which gleamed a suspicion of tears. She felt as if she were being painfully pulled two ways. How she would miss Jo! She and Jo had been close chums always. As she watched the tall, broad figure moving with his bucket of oats from one stall to another, and heard the satisfied whinny of the horses as they received their supper, she found herself thinking of the time when they had harnessed their own little shagg-a-nappy ponies and ridden together across the rolling prairie

to the schoolhouse every morning, each with a little lard-can containing dinner attached to the saddle. She recalled that evening when a wolf had stalked them nearly all the way home—a lean, grey coyote; and how proud she had felt when Jo, who was only ten then, had taken aim with his ‘twenty-two’ rifle, which he carried slung to the saddle, and had brought down the wolf, just as the brute was heading for a bluff. That had been Jo’s first wolf. Since then she, too, had brought down more than one wolf. Jo had taught her to shoot, and she was now a ‘crack shot.’ Together they had gone out with their rifles to bring in supplies of prairie chicken and ‘jack rabbits.’ Together they had herded cattle. Together they had spun along in their sleigh over the frozen snow to the town sixteen miles distant, to get the mail and provisions. Together they had made that same journey in summer, using the buggy, and had often broken their journey in the Pipestone Creek valley to gather flaming red lilies, and revel in the cool shade of the firs and poplars. Even now, as she pondered, the pccents of that fragrant valley came back to her keenly.

She had dropped down now on a bundle of hay to wait till Jo had finished his task.

He and she had done all the milking to-night, for the hired man had gone to Broadview with her father to-day. Soon the sound of sleigh-bells would announce their home-coming along the frozen trail. 'Honey' and 'Sumdog,' the two collies, would be the first to hear those sleigh-bells, and would come bounding out of their burrows in the haypile at the back of the stable, and race across the frozen snow to meet the team.

'I'm through, Peg!' called Jo from the shadows. 'Guess I'll get a move on, and do the "separating" before dad and Jake come.'

Peggy got up from the hay, and donned a sheepskin coat that hung on the end of a projecting poplar pole, pulled a fur cap down over her ears, and slipped her hands into fur mits. These precautions against the frost that bit and burnt were second nature to her, for she was Canadian born.

CHAPTER II

THE MUCH-USED MUSLIN DRESS

INSIDE the stable had been warmth, for it is always warm in a building where cattle are congregated, but outside it was very cold, being twenty degrees below zero. The stable, which, as we have seen, afforded shelter to both cows and horses, was about two hundred yards from the log farm-house. The boy and girl had to walk some distance between high walls of frozen snow; for, after a great blizzard, it had been necessary to cut a path through the snow-drifts that during the night had nearly buried the stable.

It was under a jewelled sky that they walked. Never in England would Peggy see such brilliant stars. They seemed like great diamonds suspended in the air, and the sky itself was of a wonderful purple. From the north the quivering ribbons of the aurora were shooting up golden and green and red,

in long streamers. The snow glittered in the magic light.

On a post of the gate, that was in summer the entrance to the garden, stood a solemn white owl. He was very large and very still. He was not asleep, though—oh, no! he was very wide awake. He had his supper to get, and presently hundreds of white hares would come to feed from some sacks of grain lying there on a frozen snowdrift.

Lights showed warm and inviting through the frozen glass of the farm-house windows as the brother and sister approached. 'I begin to feel good at the thought of supper,' Jo said, with a glance at the wood-pile they were passing, near which was the buckaw the boy had been previously using. 'I've got in plenty of wood for the stoves, and plenty of water from the well, and I've filled the barrel with snow in the kitchen for scrub water. Guess I'll be through when I've done the separating, for Jake will put the team in.'

Peg gave a little sigh. She was thinking that she would have to wash up the supper things before she was 'through'. Poor Peg! She had been growing more and more discontented of late. The letters which each mail brought from her 'well-off' cousins

in England were chiefly responsible. The accounts of dances and dinner parties, where people wore real evening dress, and where they were waited on by servants in fine livery; the fine house, the motor-car, the round of pleasures, the life of idle luxury, described in these letters, which, moreover, were written on such grand paper, with the address stamped at the top: 'Buckingham House, Dulwich, S.E.,' set Peggy thinking resentfully of the contrast of her own life, full of arduous tasks. She would tell herself bitterly, 'It is not fair for some girls to have everything and others nothing at all.'

Her cousins were close to London: London, full of lights and of amusements, -while she had no outlook but the vast lonely prairie which seemed to roll on to eternity. And her chance had come now to see all the splendour which she had heard about. Oh, she must go!

Could she ever bear to come back? She could not answer that question. The one thing was to go, and to hide, if possible, the joy she felt at going. She did love dad and mother, and Jo. She did not want to hurt them by any exhibition of her inward jubilation at the thought of being 'a young lady' like Millicent and Fanny, and being called

'Miss Margaret'—'Miss Margaret' it would be, she decided—instead of 'Peg'. She had gathered considerable knowledge of details of this kind from the story-books which reached her from time to time, sent by her cousins. But a certain sincerity and honesty, which were as much a part of Peggy as was her desire to see the world, would cause her to hide nothing of her simple life of toil on a Canadian farm from the great folks among whom she would find herself. She could never be ashamed to talk of the dear farm and the dear people in her prairie home.

The 'great folks' were not so very great after all. They were tradesmen who had grown rich—dad's brother William Ratten, who had an immense drapery establishment at Peckham Rye, and who now occupied a palatial residence at Dalwich, with a retinue of servants, had begun life as a boy in a small drapery shop near London Bridge, where he took down the shutters, swept up, did all kinds of 'odd jobs' and—slept under the counter. Now he was rich, he would have opened his purse freely to his younger brother John, who was a Canadian farmer, and not successful. But John's pride had stood in the way. John meant to 'make good' by his own hard work, and not by

means of money, another man had worked for. William had offered to take Jo and put him to train in the Peckham Rye shop. Jo had flouted the idea, saying 'I have no kind of use for that outfit! Give me the praise every time.' Now had come an offer to take Peggy for a year, and give her a good time, and a permanent place in the Dulwich home should she choose to remain; and, as we see, Peggy, unlike her brother, had jumped at the chance.

Jo opened the storm-door, and the inner door; then the brother and sister found themselves in a bright, warm kitchen, where a savoury smell from the cook-stove mingled with that of newly baked bread. The big brown loaves were occupying almost the entire table, where they had been placed upside down to cool. 'Mother' was bustling about in a big white apron, a bright smile on her patient face, and a cheery ring in her voice as she said, 'Hurry, Peg, and lay the table for supper in the sitting-room. Dad may be back any minute.'

The sheepskin coats, the fur caps, and mits and overshoes being got off at express speed, Peggy started to set the table, and Jo poured the sweet milk into the separator, and began to turn a handle, when, magically it would

seem, skim-milk flowed out from one place and cream from another. The skim-milk would go to the calves. The cream was for use in the home, and for making into butter for sale at Broadview. The butter brought in enough to keep the home in comforts of a modest description. A good deal was made by eggs, too, when the fowls were laying well.

The sitting-room, where Peggy was setting the table for supper, was very bright and homelike. There were two or three 'rocker' chairs as well as one in basket work. There was a substantial sofa, big enough to serve for a bed on occasion. There were plenty of gaily covered cushions about, and the red-painted floor had wolf-skins and cowhides spread upon it. There was an American organ, and there were framed pictures on the walls, as well as a fixed bookcase, well filled with volumes sent out from the old country. The staircase opened into this room, and Peggy's favourite seat was on the second step from the bottom. She chose it because a window was there, which served for her a double purpose. She got plenty of light to sew or to read by, and she could see out, and so descry any team coming on the trail; the sighting of a team being one

of the excitements of life on this lonely farm, sixteen miles away from the town, and two miles from the nearest neighbour.

To see the trail at this time of the year it was necessary to thaw out a peephole on the frozen glass of the window, which Peggy always did, though quickly enough a thin veil of frost would cover up the place again. It puzzled Peggy that this should be so, since the big stove, which occupied the centre of the room, was kept roaring with logs of wood all day, and sometimes all night too; for when it got so cold as 'forty degrees below,' Jo slept down here on the sofa and replenished the stove during the night. Peggy declared that he never woke up to do it, but did it in his sleep, for he never remembered feeding the stove when morning came, yet the fire was always 'going.'

There were two other windows in this sitting-room, one facing south, one east. Peggy's particular window faced west. The stove-pipe passed through the ceiling into Peggy's bedroom, keeping it beautifully warm, though it was not ornamental. It passed out again through a wall and across Jo's bedroom, warming that. The cook-stove pipe did a like service for the bedroom occupied by mother and dad.

Jo had finished the separating before the joyous barking of Sundog and Honey proclaimed that the sleigh-bells were sounding on the trail. The dogs would race along the frozen drifts to meet the team, but it would be some time yet before it pulled up in the yard. Peggy ran up the steep stairs to put on a white blouse and a blue ribbon. Dad always liked to see his little girl tidy and nice¹ for supper, also he it was who insisted on a gay bow of ribbon at her neck. Her long pig-tails were always tied with brown ribbon, except on the occasion of a dance at the Highland School or a neighbour's farm, when white took the place of brown. Time was when Peggy had been delighted with her white dance-ribbons, as she called them, and the white muslin dance-dress that had done duty winter after winter by means of 'letting-out' and 'letting-down.' The neat darns in it were the work of mother's tireless fingers, and scarcely visible at all, especially at night, when this dress was worn. It was to be worn again next week, for there was to be a dance at the Highland School. It would be freshly washed and ironed by mother. But Peggy, who now saw it hanging on a chair-back, evi-²lently got out of the drawer by mother, to be looked over for

possible blemishes, eyed it with much disfavour.

There was a photograph of her cousin Millicent in a ball-dress downstairs, looking so splendid and so fashionable as it stood in its frame on top of the American organ. That dress made Peggy's muslin look like an old rag, she decided. Perhaps there would be letters and more photographs for her from her cousins when dad came with the mail! She ran downstairs and put her eye to her peephole in the frozen window. The moon had risen, and the snow-clad prairie shone and glittered in its light. Numbers of big white hares were scudding over the drifts. That means that they can hear the team coming, Peggy decided.

'I can hear the dogs and the sleigh-bells,' called Jo from the depths of a towel, with which he was drying his face, after a wash at the sink. Yes! there they were, Peggy could make them out on the trail. She hastily put more cordwood into the stove, and turned on the dampers. It was scarcely needed, for the stove was red; but Peggy knew that dad would want all the warmth he could get after sixteen miles on the trail, with the thermometer marking 'twenty below.'

There came the sound of the storm-door opening, and then the door that led into the kitchen. Peggy ran out to meet her father, who was sparkling all over with frost. Frost covered every hair of the cover coat he was wearing, and every hair of his eyebrows and eyelashes. Had he worn a beard, every hair of that would have been white, too; but he was clean-shaven. His kindly grey eyes (very like Peggy's own) were smiling as he said cheerily, 'Lots of mail, Peg'—and I haven't forgotten your candy! No! No kisses for any one till I'm thawed-out!'

Peggy had as usual tried to get a kiss: she now contented herself with helping her father out of his furs, which were hung up in the kitchen, and not in the cupboard, as they would presently drip. The pegs on which they were hung were above the great barrel where the snow-water was kept, so the dripping would not make any mess on the clean floor.

'You must be longing for a hot supper, dear,' said Mrs. Ratten, smiling up at her big husband.

'Sure thing!' he answered; 'and there is a mighty good smell coming from that oven!'

'Prairie chicken, stewed with cream and

onions,' she told him; 'and a marmalade pudding in that pot!'

Jo had put on his sheepskin coat, fur hat, mits, and overshoes once more, and had gone out to the sleigh, to get the mail and the numerous purchases, while Jake put the team in. By the time he had brought everything in, his father was comfortably seated near the stove in the sitting-room—a great, lean, brown man, with good-nature writ large all over his face—and Peggy and mother had had their kiss.

It was an unwritten law that the mail and the purchases were allowed to remain undisturbed in the kitchen till after supper, but Peggy always examined the exterior of all the envelopes and parcels, thus piquing her curiosity without altogether satisfying it. To-night was no exception. She pounced on a blue bag, which she squeezed gently, and then smelt.

'I do believe the candy's chocolate this time,' she cried. 'Dad, is it chocolate? And oh! here is quite a little parcel with something soft in it! I do believe it is a new sash for the Highland School dance! And, mother, there is a handle sticking out of this parcel! I do believe dad has bought you that double-cooker!'

'It's the cooker all right, my little Peg,' came in dad's voice, which somehow sounded a bit unnatural; 'but I'm afraid there is no sash. I figure there would have been if I'd done a 'deal' with the steers, but it didn't come off; and the dollars are not too plentiful these days.'

Peggy could have bitten her tongue for alluding to the non-existent sash. It had been so common an event for dad to buy her a bit of finery on his trips to town; and the little parcel felt like a roll of ribbon. She had hurt him—her dear dad—and that hurt her terribly. She left the parcel, that had somehow lost all their interest, and rather shamefacedly made her way to the back of her father's chair, and put her arms round his neck, saying, 'It is only my fun, dad. You see, I don't want a sash. My blue one is quite good. What should I do with another?'

Yet she was keenly disappointed, and ashamed of being so.

Jo relieved the situation. He looked up from a Broadview newspaper which he had been scanning, and said,

'A good-looking girl like you, Peg, can look the best in the room without any new rig, you can take that from me!'

Then the hired man came in, and supper was served. Such a merry supper it was, for Jake had a sense of humour, and told the town news in a way that made every one laugh. Jake was Canadian born, as were Peggy and Jo. He was twenty, a clean, bright boy, who saw everything rosy, even the prospect of taking up 'scrip' at Ettington in another year. 'Scrip' is unbroken land, and Ettington is forty miles away from a town—so lonely a spot that it might well strike fear into the heart of one less brave than Jake.

But though Jake's stories made Peggy bubble over with laughter, she longed for supper to be over that the letters might be opened.

CHAPTER III

THE OPENING OF THE MAIL

'Guess I'll wash up supper things for you, Peggy, and I'll wash the separator for Jo, so you can all get through your mail,' Jake said good-naturedly. 'Never get any mail myself, but I figure it's mighty interesting to them who do.'

This was no unusual proceeding. Jake's singing which accompanied the dish-washing was also nothing unusual. Jake was a sensitive boy, and singing was his delectable way of showing that he was not listening while the mail was being read.

Mrs. Ratten did the reading aloud while her husband smoked.

To-night Jo was busying himself sewing a patch on a grain-sack, while he listened, but Peggy sat on the stairs, her eye to her peephole, her hands idle. She was palpitating with excitement, and kept her face

to the window that the joy on it might not be visible to the others. It seemed too unkind to look so happy about going away, and the letter her mother was reading was all about that.

'Of course,' read Mrs. Ratten, 'I mentioned a year only because I want to see how the plan works. I shall be glad enough to make Peggy one of my own chicks, in which case they will all share and share alike. But Peggy mayn't tumble to the ways of her aunt and cousins. I'm sure I don't! what with their "At Homes" and dinners and dances. I could sometimes find it in my heart to wish for the old times when we had a little house in a row, and the washing was done at home. Being rich isn't all roses, I can tell you both, though you mayn't find that easy to believe. I don't believe the missus really likes it, if she owns the truth, though she pretends she does. She can't forget that she once served behind a counter, I fancy, and I'm sure she's afraid of the servants! It's the girls that dote on show, bless them! Perhaps it's natural.'

Mrs. Ratten broke off suddenly and glanced towards Peggy, to see how she was taking all this. But Peggy's eye was glued to the peephole in the frosted glass. She could

see the white jack-rabbits scuttling over the glistening snow-drifts, and the big white owl busy over somefang. She could see the wonderful arrow shooting its brilliant, quivering ribbons upwards, and a big golden moon rising above the bluff which cornered the far pasture. She could hear the mournful call of a wolf that was hungry. All this she was conscious of, yet she had not passed a word of the letter, and was forming opinions. Uncle William seemed to be unduly discontented with his good fortune—ungratefully so. Of course Millicent and Fanny were right in wanting to enjoy themselves.

Dad poked at his pipe in silence. Jo stretched almost viciously at the grain-sack.

Mrs. Ratten went on: 'Well, Peggy can choose her own frocks and hats and faldabals like the girls, and she'll have pocket money the same as the others. Tell her from me that if anything doesn't suit her she can just tell the old uncle, and he'll do his best to fix things. I'll be real glad to have a child of yours. I wish Jo had been willing to come.'

'Not for me!' Jo exclaimed, breaking the needle he was using, and sucking an injured thumb before he went on. 'I

figure the prairie is good enough for me. I've no use for all that high-faluting. Give me the prairie every time !'

'That is not a very grateful way to talk, Jo,' gently reproved his mother. 'Your Uncle William is most kind.'

'Sure,' said Jo; 'I know that, and I guess I am not ungrateful; but I figure I'd make a guy slow among that bunch. I like work, and I have no use for shows. Peg will wish herself back here so soon she'll think she has always wished it.'

The mother and father exchanged a glance full of meaning. Perhaps they were hoping Jo's last words would come true. To miss bright little Peggy from their home was a prospect they both dreaded more than they acknowledged to each other. As Jake was wont to say of Peggy, 'The sun and the moon shine out of her.' Her funlit eyes, her sweet smile, her gay laughter, her unfailing good temper—these things meant much in a prairie home, as they would have meant much anywhere.

Peggy said nothing until Uncle William's letter was finished, then she asked for her own personal mail. Her quick eyes had detected two parcels bearing her name, but she knew she had first to hear such letters

as Mrs. Ratten chose to read aloud. 'This was a form always gone through.

'Here you are, Peg!' said her father, throwing the first parcel adroitly into her lap, and adding, 'the other one is books, so I won't throw that.'

'More stories about fine ladies, I guess,' muttered Jo, who had finished and folded his grain-sack.

The mother frowned at him. Jo answered the look by saying,

'I don't figure stories about fine ladies do any good to a girl who has to live in a prairie farm.'

More might have followed had not Peggy given vent to a cry of delight. 'Oh, mother, look! Look, dad! Jo, do look!'

The girl dangled a most beautiful sash before their eyes. It was of pure silk, and very wide. It was of a soft grey, over which trailed a design of pink roses exquisitely shaded. It was the latest thing in sashes. Even Jo admired it, though grudgingly. 'It's the clear thing,' he declared.

'So you've got a new sash for the Highlands School dance after all, Peg,' dad said delightedly.

Mother said, 'It is sure pretty. I must get up that white muslin to-morrow. I put it out to remind me.'

Peggy's face became momentarily clouded. She was thinking of the muslin dress she had mentally called 'an old rag' as she had seen it hanging over the chair-back in her bedroom. If only she had a new dress to wear with the wonderful sash! The marks where repeated tucks had been let down showed. It was really getting tight across the chest, and the waist had come to look short with the increasing length of skirt!

Jake came in; he had finished his washing-up, and concluded that the others were through with the private part of the mail, as there was a sound of general conversation.

'The wolves have got busy with the carcass of that horse Abe Miller put out on the prairie,' he remarked. 'They are howling to beat the band away north.' Then he caught sight of the sash. 'Say!' he ejaculated, 'that's sure a dandy outfit! Come from the old country, I figure?'

'Uncle William sent it,' said Peggy, holding it nearer for his inspection. 'It came out of his fine shop way back at Peckham Rye.'

'Have a game, Jake?' came in Jo's voice.

'Sure,' answered the hired man.

The two boys were soon deep in their game,

and Mr. Ratten made an accompaniment on the American organ, which he played by ear. Peggy had had some music lessons at Broadview, but she could never get as much real music out of the old organ as her father did, nor had she his skill on the violin, which he played also by ear. Jo played the violin very well, and had mastered the reading of music without any lessons. But Peggy had a possession all her own. She had a beautiful singing voice. She added it now to her father's playing of 'The Last Rose of Summer,' at the same time opening her parcel of story-books, which were gaily bound and illustrated.

Mrs. Ratten had risen to put on the porridge to cook for next morning's breakfast. It would remain on the cook-stove till bedtime, one or another giving it a stir at intervals. Mrs. Ratten placed a joint of pork near the stove to 'thaw out' for to-morrow's cooking too. It had been brought in from the granary, where the meat was kept ready cut into joints; and at present it was frozen solid. The bread had cooled off, and the loaves were ready to carry down to the cellar under the kitchen. This cellar was also the larder. It was a wonderful place, dug out, and having a crypt-like appearance by reason

of its roof-supports, which were joined up in arches. There were dug-out shelves, which resembled ovens. On the floor in a corner was the winter supply of vegetables, which included cabbages, cut in summer, which by some miracle always remained fresh through the winter.

There was something else in that cellar too!—a long, black snake, quite harmless, but terrible in appearance. He made his home there, and no one interfered with him except 'Poo,' the cat, who also got into the cellar on theft intent. Poo always spat viciously at the snake from a safe distance. The way to the cellar was through the floor of the kitchen. There was a trap-door and a ladder.

To-night Mrs. Ratten fancied she heard a yelp from the cellar. Poo might be there, but Poo could not yelp. She set down the saucepan of oatmeal and water on the cook-stove hurriedly, and proceeded to open the trap-door. Yes, there was some animal down there sure enough! She called to the boys. They both came running from the sitting-room, followed by Peggy, who was all excitement. What was it and how had it got there?

'It might be a badger,' Peggy suggested.

'Or a skunk,' put in Jo; 'and, if so, woe betide us if we disturb it!'

Mr. Ratten, now aware that something was happening, left off in the last bar but one his rendering of 'Her Bright Smile Haunts me Still,' and joined the party in the kitchen, but as every one explained the situation at once, the bewildered farmer understood nothing. He saw his son descending the ladder, while Jake held a coal-oil lamp to light the steps, and to give into Jo's outstretched hand as soon as the bottom rung of the ladder should be reached. But before Jo reached that bottom rung he uttered a yell, followed by the words, 'The all-fired thing has set its teeth in my leg!'

CHAPTER IV

THE ANIMAL IN THE CELLAR

'TAKE the lamp, Jo,' called Jake, 'I'll come down. Get my twenty-two, John; it's loaded—there on the wall.'

Mr. Ratten, whom Jake had called 'John'—for all men in the prairie are called by their Christian names—got the gun to hand to Jake. He had by this time grasped the situation. There was some animal in the cellar, and a savage one.

Mrs. Ratten and Peggy stood looking down into the cellar, quietly waiting events, as is the way with women and girls who live in the prairie. They do not scream or 'fuss': they wait, and are ready to act too, when the moment comes for them to help.

Then there came from the subterranean regions a dual roar of laughter, followed by a shouted piece of information: 'It's nothing

but a collic pup.' Then Jo sprang up the ladder carrying the dog in his arms.

It was Peggy who first made the discovery that the dog had lost one of its feet.

'Oh, the poor thing!' she cried, with tears in her bright eyes. 'Dad, you must see to it right now.'

John Ratten was very clever in surgery, as are many Canadian settlers, and at once undertook to see to the poor mutilated stump, Mrs. Ratten insisting first on giving the poor dog a bowl of skim-milk, to which she added some cream. He drank the milk as though he were starving, thanking his benefactors by a feeble wag of his bushy tail. He was mild enough now he was satisfied that he was among friends.

'Gee!' exclaimed John as he looked at the stump, which showed signs of recent injury. 'Guess the poor dog has had a scrap with those all-fired wolves! Poor little beggar! His throat has had teeth in it, too, though not deep. He can't be more than six months old. I wonder where he belongs?'

'Here, now,' Peggy pronounced, 'he is going to be my dog.'

'We'll have to advertise him in the *Broadview Express*, little woman,' John

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Ratten reminded her. 'If he is not claimed, why you can sure have him.'

In a week's time the dog was well, and careering over the frozen drifts with Honey and Sundog, despite the fact that one of his front paws was missing. His manner of locomotion earned him the name of 'Bounce.'

The dance at the Highland School had had to be put off owing to a blizzard, but the happy evening came at last, and Peggy stood arrayed in the white muslin, which did not look like a rag at all after Mrs. Ratten's careful laundry operations. It looked very dainty, in fact; and the new sash was very smart. But Peggy thought the thick, serviceable shoes she wore very out of keeping, and caught herself longing for the days when she would be wearing lovely evening shoes—perhaps satin!

Dad and mother, Jo and Jake, were all wearing their best clothes, for they were all going to the dance. Everybody goes to prairie dances, including the babies! Every household takes a basket of cakes and sandwiches and what-not, as a contribution to the supper, which is, oddly enough, called 'lunch.'

Mrs. Ratten's basket was ready. Jake and Jo had fed all the animals after the milking and 'separating' were done, and were now putting the team of spirited bronchos into the sleigh while John fastened Honey and Sundog and Bounce up in the granary to prevent their following the sleigh. On the kitchen table lay a pile of fur coats and fur rugs (which are called robes in Canada), while on an upturned soap-box a big charcoal foot-warmer waited to be put into the sleigh.

A jangle of sleigh-bells caused Mrs. Ratten and Peggy to get their fur coats, caps, and mitts on. The team must not be kept standing.

In came the menfolk, who scrambled into their furs, and carried out the basket of good things, another containing cups, saucers, plates, &c., the foot-warmer, and the robes.

Then came the mounting into the sleigh, and the 'tucking-in' and jokes and laughter, and away sped the sleigh over the frozen snow. Above, in a purple sky, hung myriads of stars like jewels. They seemed so big and so loose in the air, that Peggy said she felt as if she could catch one like a ball. She would never say that about the stars in an English sky, which never look as if they are *loose* and *falling*. Presently they passed through a bluff of poplars and spruce.

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Here was beauty indeed, for every twig was jewelled with frost gems, that glittered and shone in the brilliant light of stars and aurora, till it was like fairyland in gale-time. Then came another long stretch of snow-clad prairie, where strange white animals ran and jumped at the sound of the sleigh bells. Once a lean, grey wolf crossed the trail in front of the sleigh, and trotted away in search of supper.

Then a descent was made into the Pipestone valley. Down, down, they sped at a break-neck rate, the spirited little bronches plunging, and more than once falling outright, to rise again and race on as if all this were but the most ordinary affair. None of the occupants of the sleigh were afraid, but they clung tightly to the sides of the sleigh and to each other, laughing and joking. Jo kept telling his mother that he was sure that her beloved china was getting broken, which did alarm the dear lady, for the said china, though packed in hay, certainly did rattle ominously. Then Jake declared that his nose was frozen, and scooped up some snow from a drift as they hurried on to rub the affected part. He had scarcely completed the operation to his satisfaction when a terrible shriek broke the silence. It was a

blood-curdling shriek, startling even to these prairie-bred folk, for they knew it proceeded from a lynx, and that a lynx has an unpleasant way of dropping from a branch to fasten its terrible claws on a victim. Peggy would not show fear, but she was very thankful when they had successfully mounted the other side of the valley, and were once more in the open prairie, where there were no trees to harbour the hateful lynx.

All at once they heard shouting, mingled with laughter.

'Some one is stuck in a drift,' said John, urging the bronches forward. The sturdy little beasts did not need urging, however. They are like the sleigh-dogs that are half-wolf, and willingly gave their last ounce of strength. These dogs are called 'huskies,' and a husky is ever impatient to be running, even though a heavy load has to be dragged and the trail is bad.

'Hallo!' called John, Jo, and Jake, all together.

'Say!' is that you, John?' came in the familiar voice of Farmer Jenner.

'That's so; what's the trouble?' called John.

'We're stuck in a drift; glad you came along.'

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With the united efforts of John, Jake, and Jo, with vocal assistance from Bill Jenner, the sleigh was extricated, and the plunging bronchos, trembling and snorting, were once more flying along the trail. Soon the lighted windows of the schoolhouse came in sight, and the sound of violins accompanied by an American organ made themselves heard. Dancing had apparently already begun.

Driving into the schoolhouse yard, the two teams had to steer warily between the many sleighs and 'cutters' already there. The horses were all stabled. A prairie schoolhouse has always plentiful stable accommodation because so many of the children come to school mounted on shagg-a-nappy ponies.

Mrs. Jenner and her daughter Mollie—a girl about Peggy's age—got out of their sleigh first, Mrs. Jenner remarking that she was 'sure glad to be away from that outfit,' and Mollie reminding her a little unkindly that she had got to go home in it, anyway! Mrs. Ratten and Peggy were soon out of their sleigh too, and together they all picked their way along the frozen drifts to the schoolhouse door, which was now open to receive them. Those within had heard the sleigh-bells and had calculated the time to a moety.

CHAPTER V

AN UNINVITED GUEST

PEGGY found herself the centre of attraction when she entered the schoolroom, where the dancers were now sitting round the room till the next dance would be 'called.' Peggy imagined that the beautiful new sash was responsible for the marked attention she was receiving, but this was not the case. The story had circulated from farm to farm that Peggy was going to the 'old country' in the spring, and more than this, the grandeur of the relations she was to stay with had, with Jake's aid, become so tremendous, that every one was anxious to hear all about it from Peggy herself. She discovered that she had suddenly become a girl of importance, though not necessarily more popular. Peggy liked it. It was a foretaste of the glory to come. She lost her head a little, and poured forth accounts of the wonders of Buckingham House to a bevy of maidens, who were plying

her with questions. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes shining. She was quite unconscious that the kind eyes of her mother were regarding her a little sadly, or that Jo, who had come in, was frowning at her. What she did observe was that Mollie Jenner was looking envious. Mollie had harder work to do than Peggy, for there were younger brothers and sisters requiring to be looked after, as well as the usual work of a prairie farm-house. That morning, Mollie had washed dozens of small garments and hung them out in such bitter cold that they froze stiff while she was pegging them to the line; and the frost stung her hands, even through the woollen mits.

Some of the girls stared in real astonishment, not unflavoured with disapproval. They had never heard Peggy 'swank' before; but then, though Peggy had always possessed 'grand' relations in the 'old country,' there had been no talk of her going to visit them till now. One or two were wondering what Peggy would come back like—if, indeed, she ever came back.

The 'swanking' came to an abrupt termination by reason of the 'caller-off' shouting to the men to get partners for a quadrille, and a general rush began. Only the younger

men danced. The older ones played cards or talked and smoked in a corner behind the American organ.

The music commenced. The tune was 'Pop Goes the Weasel,' and the 'caller-off,' who directed the dancing, sang at the top of his voice :

First couple lead up to the right,
Don't you make a blunder,
Balance there, and circle half,
Pop couple under.

Peggy danced with Mollie's brother Jim, an old schoolmate, who told her much as Jo had done, that she'd want to quit on the old country the first thing she knew when she got there; and Peggy got cross and refused to dance any more with Jim that evening. She relented, however, being really a very good-tempered girl, and danced with Jim in the 'Jersey' and the 'Rock-Away' which followed; and he rewarded her by seeing that she had a big piece of the very special iced cake which had come in his mother's hamper.

But this was not until 'lunch' was served. Such a joyous business was that 'lunch!' The men and boys brought water for the big

kettles which were placed upon the roaring stove ; and put huge teapots to warm, while the women and girls unpacked crockery and hamper of dainties. A very gay scene it was too, though only illuminated by coal-oil wall-lamps. Nearly all the girls wore white muslin, decked with gay ribbons, and the men all wore their 'glad-rags,' by which curious name their best clothes are called. Every one was in the highest spirits, joking and laughing, except the old men in the corner, who were being happy in their own more sober way. Even the waking-up inopportunately of a few babies, cradled among the fur robes in an ante-room, did not damp any one's spirits ; and it was the boys who went to quiet them with candy, and 'put them off.' Everybody helps everybody else in the prairie, which is one reason why the simple prairie folks are so happy.

Lunch was nearly over when a dismal howl made itself heard on the other side of the door, and quite close to it.

'Gee!' cried Jo, 'that's a wolf, sure! Hasn't it got a nerve to come to our dance uninvited!'

A young farmer opened the door a few inches. He had a six-shooter handy with which to answer the wolf's appeal for ad-

mission. It was a good thing he did not shoot right away, for it was a dog that squeezed his way in—a dog with every hair frost-coated. He had, moreover, one paw missing. Sure enough it was Bounce. With joyous yelps he made for the stove and shook himself, which caused a shower of ice to fly off him into the faces of some girls, who squealed and laughed.

‘Poor old Bounce!’ exclaimed Peggy. ‘He must have followed us at a distance, keeping out of sight in case he was sent back! He does deserve some lunch, and he shall have some, too!’

‘I thought you tied all the dogs up, John!’ remarked Jake, with a merry twinkle in his eyes.

John scratched his head meditatively.

‘I sure did,’ he presently said in bewildered fashion.

Bounce wagged his bushy tail upon the floor, sending out more showers of ice. He apparently considered himself a hero, more especially as a plate of good things was put under his nose by his young mistress. Peggy now considered Bounce her property, as no reply had come to the advertisement in the *Broadview Express*, and no one at all seemed to know where Bounce had come

from. It was believed that probably some Indians had owned him and that he had escaped from the 'Reserve.'

After his meal, Bounce became quite lively, and did not lie by the stove and sleep, as might have been expected, after a ten miles run over the snow with only three serviceable legs. When dancing recommenced, he ran round the room with the dancers to the amusement of every one. But he committed an indiscretion. What he did was to seize on Peggy's white muslin skirt as it flew past him, tearing a festoon, which he hung on to, while he followed Peggy and her partner round, for Peggy would not stop dancing nor have the dog beaten off. She held that it was great fun, and was secretly glad that the dress of which she was so tired would now never be worn again; and, after all, what did it matter? Was she not soon to have fine dresses that would be new and fashionable?

It was during the sleigh ride home that Mrs. Ratten gently reproved the girl for allowing the dog to tear the skirt more than need be. She reminded her young daughter that wilful waste makes woful want.

Peggy smiled to herself as she thought of the 'plenty of everything' at Buckingham

House, which she was to share. She patted the head of Bounce under the robes. (It had been decided that Bounce should not do a second ten miles on three legs, so he was in the sleigh.) All at once she exclaimed most unexpectedly, 'Mother, I shall take Bounce to the old country with me if uncle and aunt won't mind. It would be like a bit of home to have Bounce!'

The last part of this speech touched the mother-heart. That Peggy should want a bit of home with her meant a great deal to Mrs. Ratten, who had been full of fears lest Peggy should be weaned away altogether from the old prairie home. She knew the girl's love of finery and things beautiful and easy, though she did her child the justice of owning that Peggy never shirked work, or complained really about her scanty wardrobe. Perhaps Bounce would be a strong link binding her to home. It was this thought that caused her to say, 'You shall take Bounce if it can be managed.'

'Gee-whizz!' cried Jo, 'I figure that is a stiff proposition!'

'Not one we can't tackle, I guess,' put in John, who had tumbled to his wife's reasoning with that instinct which is born of intimate and affectionate companionship.

'Guess we can spare Bounce,' Jake remarked with deep meaning. 'He's killed three chickens this week. Yesterday he helped himself from the bucket of milk I'd set ready for the calves, and then upset the rest of it. He got herding the pigs too!—clear over the fence he got to chase them round their yard into their house, biting at their legs, and then squealing to beat the band. But he got one for himself from the old mare. "Min" wasn't taking any of his impudence! I reckon the captain of the ship'll have Bounce overboard that quick he'll think he's always been in the sea, if so be Peggy gets him as far as the ship. More than likely he'll be left on the track of the Canadian Pacific, helped there by the conductor!'

Peggy broke out indignantly:

'Shame on you, Jake, to say such things of a poor dog who has only three paws! He's a very good dog; and he's only young. He's a bit playful and mischievous, but that's the worst that any one can say of him.'

The wordy war might have continued but for the fact that they had reached home, and every one was anxious to get the stoves 'going,' and have hot tea and biscuits

before getting to bed. The team had to be put up, and 'brushed-off' and fed. The other dogs had to be liberated from the granary too. In doing this last piece of work Jo discovered that though Honey and Samdog were still tied up, the door was open! There was a piece of frayed rope to indicate where Bounce had been tied up. He had bitten his way to liberty, and must have jumped at the wooden latch till he succeeded in getting the door open.

Jo gave all the dogs their supper, Bounce insisting that he had some too, despite the meal he had had at the schoolhouse! Then all three dogs raced off to their burrows in the hay pile.

Soon every one was in bed. It was nearly three o'clock in the morning. But Peggy, in her snug room under the pointed roof, did not go to sleep at once. She was not thinking of the dance, however; she was thinking with hilarious joy that possibly Bounce would be her travelling companion in that wonderful journey to the old country. It would be glorious to have Bounce with her. She would never feel lonely if she had him. Mother and dad were on her side about it, so it was as good as settled. When at last she slept, it was to dream of splendours

like those of the Arabian Nights. She walked through vast marble halls, decked out like a princess, and Bounce followed behind, wearing a gold collar.

CHAPTER VI

FROG LEAVES THE PRAIRIE

APRIL had come, and now the time till Peggy's departure could be counted by weeks. The big sloughs (a slough is a pond, and pronounced *sloo*) were musical with the trilling of frogs. Canadian frogs do not croak, but trill. Crane, wild geese, and wild ducks had come back, and the meadow larks sang. The cattle roamed at will at this time: later they would be confined to a special pasture. Armies of pretty furry little gophers came out of the holes in which they had hidden in winter. They were so glad that the snow was gone that they frisked like kittens. Muskrats made themselves heard as evening closed in. Coyotes—gaunt, tawny, or light grey prairie wolves—knowing that now the chickens would be at large, came sneaking round the farm, and even entered the yard. But Bounce, who had a personal grievance

against wolves, chased them off, and they fled before him like the cowards they are. Bounce knew that they were not dangerous in the open as in the bush ; so, like the wise dog he was, he never now followed a wolf any farther than the entrance to the bush. He had done that on a former occasion, and had narrowly escaped with his life. He had learnt by experience.

There was a blue haze over the prairie now, due to innumerable crocus flowers. Work had begun once more 'on the land.' Snakes (quite harmless ones) wriggled over the furrows made by the plough. A glorious sun shone out of the bluest of skies. Certainly a glorious sun had shone on the snow-clad prairie ; but that sun had given no warmth, while this sun did.

Peggy was now a good deal in the saddle. It was her business to herd the cattle and to 'round-up' the vicious, unbroken colts, which sometimes strayed for miles across the rolling prairie—the prairie in Saskatchewan is not flat, as some imagine, but rolls like the 'Downs' in the old country. One needs to be a good rider there, for the ground is full of badger holes, and is very rough under the stiff prairie grass. But Peggy was as much at her ease on the back of her spirited broncho

as most people are in an easy-chair. She could mount from the ground as lightly as a bird, and once up, was as secure as the finest circus rider. She had herself broken colts. But this spring she was not the usual Peggy, though she did the usual things. Whatever she was doing there was always at the back of her mind that voyage in front of her, and the glories at the end of it. She was at once glad and sad. glad that beautiful new adventures lay before her, and sad at the coming separation from her mother and dad, and Jo, and all her prairie friends. She was thankful to know that Bounce was to go with her. Her Uncle William had written to say she might bring the dog by all means. He had, moreover, sent her a cheque all for herself to pay the passage of herself and Bounce. She was to travel first-class, he said; but this had been changed to second, because one of the neighbouring farmer's wives was going to England to visit her friends, and she was going to take charge of Peggy on the voyage. As she could not afford first-class fares, Peggy would go second. Peggy was much annoyed when the station-agent had told her that Bounce would not be allowed to be in her cabin with her on board ship; but she was in a measure

consoled to find that she would be allowed to exercise him on deck.

It seemed strange to Peggy as she went about her accustomed tasks that soon all these familiar scenes would vanish from her sight, and exist only in memory-pictures, much like the dreams she had of marble palaces where fountains played. Could it be possible that soon the log farm-house, the sod stable, the granary, the chicken-house, the hay pile, and the wood pile, would vanish? Would she round-up the cattle and the colts only in dreams? Would there be no more milking and butter-making, and washing and ironing, and going to church service at the Highlands schoolhouse? There would be no more trips in the buggy to Broadview till that last one, which was to take her and her luggage to the station, where she and Mrs. Swoeny would get on board the Atlantic train at midnight, and be carried away day and night for nearly a week, till Montreal would be reached.

Peggy's outfit was in process of making. Lisbeth Dann, down at the creek, was busy with frocks for her; and she had to ride down there every now and then to be 'tried on.' Eton's catalogue was constantly being consulted. Eton's store is a very big store

in Winnipeg, and already a big parcel of things had been sent for to supply Peggy's needs. Mrs. Ratten meant to send her little girl 'as nice as nice could be,' even though her uncle and aunt had said, 'Don't bother about clothes. We can fit Peggy out from our shop with no trouble at all.' It should not be said that Peggy arrived 'anyhow' as to clothes. Peggy's travelling coat and skirt were of grey homespun—a light grey, much the colour of her eyes, and there were actually six white muslin blouses to wear with it! 'The child can't wear a soiled blouse on the journey,' Mrs. Ratten had explained, in extenuation of this apparent extravagance. Also, these same blouses could be worn with the new white muslin skirts Lsbeth Dann had made, and with the blue serge skirt. The dress 'all-in-one' which was made of figured delaine, would of course be for Sundays. This dress was very grand indeed, by reason of having buttons that looked like pearls all down the bodice, and three rows of white lace insertion in the skirt. All Peggy's friends had come at intervals to see materials, or finished garments, as the case might be.

Peggy felt very important indeed. It puzzled her not a little that in these days

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her eyes so often filled with tears. 'There is sure nothing to cry about,' she would tell herself. Such funny things brought these sudden tears, too. They came at the sound of the trilling of the frogs sometimes. They came when Jo brought the team in, all dusty from the ploughing. They came at the sound of young calves calling for their pail of milk. It was all so silly, she thought. Yet she could not help it. She did not know yet that every sight and sound of the prairie home was pulling at her heartstrings. She did not yet know how dear it all was to her. In these days she could not listen to dad playing on the American organ; and Jo's violin she could not endure at all. Jake ceased to joke at meals. Meals had become strained. There were frequent silences.

Peggy was to sail in the *Victorian*. It was the first steamer to go from Montreal after the breaking-up of the ice on the great river St. Lawrence this spring. During the winter, ships for England sailed from St. John's in New Brunswick. Peggy was glad that she should go down the beautiful river, and see Quebec, perched, as she had heard, so picturesquely on a high cliff. But now she had ceased to chatter of these things. It hurt those around her, and in some but little

understood way hurt her. This going away to which she had so looked forward was a surprising wrench.

So the days went on till May came—the month of her departure.

A haze of green was showing on the vast expanse of ploughing. It was the new wheat. This year she would not see it tall and golden, ready for the reaping. She would be five thousand miles away then! The threshers would come, and a steer would be killed with which to feed them. There would be a great baking of bread and pastry, and biscuits and cake, for that army of hungry men. But she would not be there helping. Truly it did not bear thinking of. But, after all, she was going to the palace of her dreams! So was fourteen-year-old Peggy pulled two ways by her emotions.

At last the Sunday came on which good-byes must be said. They would not leave for the station till the afternoon. She and mother and dad were going in the buggy, and Jo was bringing the luggage and Bounce (who was to ride) with another team. Of course they were to go in company.

On the Sunday morning Jake washed and combed Bounce, and Peggy made the round

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of the farm to say farewell to all the animals. She nearly broke down when she kissed her own particular broncho pony 'Ned' good-bye. He was in the pasture, and came running up to the fence at her call. He rubbed his soft nose against her and whinnied. His large bright eyes looked troubled. Peggy fancied he knew she was going away. 'I wish! oh, how I wish I could take you with me as well as Bounce!' she said to him. 'But I shall sure come back, Ned! and we will gallop over the prairie again!' She thought he understood, and most probably he did. Animals know a great deal more than people give them credit for, especially those who are kindly treated.

Jake came up to Peggy as she turned away from Ned.

'Say, Peg,' he said, in as cheerful tone as he could manage, 'I've got a little maple-leaf brooch for you with "Canada" written across it. Maybe you'll wear it to remember me by.'

'I'll sure wear it, Jake,' Peggy said, as she took it from his hand and pinned it on there and then. 'I think it real kind of you! Thank you, Jake. I'll send you something from the old country to remember me by.'

'Guess we'll not forget you, Peg,' Jake told her; 'and I'll look after Ned, special.'

When a little time later Jake saw the two teams becoming specks on the trail, he felt very sad. He would be quite alone on the farm that night, for as the train that was to carry Peggy away left at midnight, her parents and brother would sleep at Broadview.

'Seems like some one's dead!' he said to himself, as he went back to the deserted farm-house. 'But I must buck up; the others'll want cheering some when they come back to-morrow. Guess it's my job!'

He went to work to wash up the crockery left from the last meal, and noted, as he removed the food, what a pretence the meal had been. Scarcely anything had been eaten.

CHAPTER VII

PEGGY'S 'SEND-OFF'

Lots of friends came to see Peggy at Broad-view station, and she felt very important indeed, which helped to keep up her spirits. No less than five maple-leaf brooches were bestowed on her! As to lunch-baskets—well, it became a question whether the contents would ever get eaten, though she would have nearly a week in the train, and practical assistance from Bounce. So many friends had brought offerings in this form. Every one knew that Mrs. Sweeny would never venture into the grand dining-car, but would do her own cooking in the kitchen on the train, and the two would take their meals on one of the handy pull-out tables. Mrs. Sweeny had also her own crowd to see her off, and her own generous collection of lunch-baskets. She was 'all flustered,' she told everybody, and felt like 'quitting.' She was quite sure she was going to be very

ill on the ship, and that there would be swarms of mosquitoes in the train. The train was sure to get off the line, through picking up cows with 'that thing on the engine.' They were sure to miss the boat at Montreal, and the dog would jump off the train and 'quit on them.' Her brother Patrick would close his toyshop at Hastings, and come to Liverpool to meet them, and he would miss them, for she (Mrs. Sweeny) had been but a slip of a girl when she left the old country to get spliced to Mick Sweeny; and Patrick (so she had been told) had grown a beard. There would be no end of bother with the customs officers at Liverpool, because she was going to refuse to uncord her box, or to let them do it, for Mick, the varmint! had forgotten to get a new rope, and the box had had to be tied up with odds and ends out of the stable; and once it was unroped, she couldn't do it up again—not with that rope! Bounce would be sure to jump overboard, if he didn't jump off the train!

How much more Mrs. Sweeny would have said we can only guess at, for her prophecies were cut short by the call, 'All on board!'

Peggy had been saying good-bye to Mr. Thomas, who was proprietor of the station

refreshment rooms, and had bestowed a huge bag of candy on her. She came up to Mrs. Sweeny with her father and mother and Jo. Jo had deposited Bounce in the van, where dogs were supposed to stay (but didn't always, as we shall see). There were hurried good-byes and a final recommendation to Mick Sweeny from his wife not to forget to 'set that hen.'

Then the monster train got in motion. Peggy leaned out of an open window calling more good-byes, and promises of letters from Montreal and Quebec. Then when she could no longer make out even the lights of the station, she suddenly burst into a passion of tears.

'By the holy saints!' exclaimed Mrs. Sweeny, 'and it's crying you are, Peggy, and you going to see all the sights, you are! Now, look at me! I'm not crying, though by the powers there mayn't be any farm left when I get back, Mick being so ramshackle, and forgetting to remember like he does. Look at you! going for a grand holiday and coming back full of all the glories and all, to liven up the prairie come a year—and you crying!'

'I'm not!' exclaimed Peggy indignantly, the tears streaming down her face.

'Well, of all the——' began Mrs. Sweeny.

'I've stopped,' explained Peggy, with a choke. 'It was seeing mother and dad and Jo getting dimmer and dimmer, and then going out. Mrs. Sweeny, I can come back right away if I want to. Dad has given me dollar bills to come back with. Mother sewed them up in a little bag, and it is round my neck under my clothes.'

'By the same token we had best get under the bed-clothes, Peg. I must find our "sleepers." I guess I'm fair tired. I got up at three o'clock to leave all clean and sweet at home. I wish I had a big daughter like you to leave in charge. Muck and the boys will mess up the place past knowledge, in no time, they will, if I know them! But I said "now or never" to myself. It's sixteen—nearly seventeen—years since I saw the old country. I'm wondering if I'll know my way about Hastings! Ireland I have never seen since I was seven, but I can remember grandfather's pigsty, because I dropped my hat over the wall when I climbed up to see the new litter of pigs, and the old sow ate it! Gospel truth!—Where are we to stow all those lunch-baskets! Guess we'd best pile them on the rack in our "sleepers."'

'I shall get up early and get Bounce

out,' pronounced Peggy, who was more concerned about her dog than about the lunch basket.

'The conductor won't let Bounce run about the train, I can tell you that!' Mrs. Sweeny declared.

'Well, any way, I can go and sit with him,' rejoined Peggy; 'and I know Jo spoke to him about Bounce, and I believe I know what was said. Jo gave him a dollar bill, I know that.'

'Bribery and corruption,' retorted Mrs. Sweeny.

Peggy's clear grey eyes laughed, though on her lips was only the mere flicker of a smile. It was certain that she approved of this particular piece of bribery and corruption. Poor Bounce! he would have been so unhappy had he been shut up in the van all the time, with only the respite (on a chain) of a trot up and down a railway platform during a long stop! Peggy and Jo and the Broadview station-agent had put their heads together during a visit to the town prior to Peggy's departure, and the result was that the conductor, being assured of the good manners of the colbe (and for other reasons!) had seen fit to 'stretch a point.' He stretched more points later, as we shall

see; but dollars had nothing to do with that!

Early next morning Peggy left her 'sleeper' and made a rapid toilet in the dressing-room. Canadian Pacific trains have as many conveniences as if they were hotels on wheels. There is a reading and music room, an observation car, which is a luxurious lounge; an outside open-air car at the back of the train, furnished with a gay awning of red and white, and with wicker chairs and little tables; there is a dining-car, where meals are served as well as in the best hotels, the whitest of napery, the shiniest silver and glass, and dainty china. Bouquets of flowers ornament the tables. Then for the third-class passengers there is a kitchen, with a cook stove alight and a proper sink in which to wash up.

Peggy, with Bounce at her heels, made a trip through the whole train, looking at everything, and making friends. Bounce had learnt that the absence of a paw was an open sesame to all manner of favours, and, clever dog that he was, he held up the pawless leg and showed it, much in the same way that beggars outside Continental churches show their wounds to obtain pity—and coin. Bounce looked into the eyes of each stranger

with a pathetic appeal in his own, while he presented the injured leg for inspection; and he won all along the line. The third-class passengers were busy preparing their breakfast. They were mostly composed of people who were going to California; but there was a sprinkling of folk going home to the old country. One woman, who had come from Vancouver, had with her a tiny girl who was being taken to the old country to visit her grandparents. She was a fair, yellow-haired little creature, with blue eyes, and was called Ada. She was three years old. When she saw Bounce she danced with joy. She loved dogs, and had a collie for a play-mate away in Vancouver. She put her arms round Bounce's neck and kissed him; then she kissed the poor stump where once a paw had been. As for Bounce, he licked the child's face, and wagged his bushy tail. These two had made friends in a moment. Ada, with her mother's permission, made the tour of the train with Peggy and the dog. It chanced that this little girl was the only child on the train, though there were quite a number of babies in arms. Ada declared these did not count as they weren't children yet, but 'little tings.' 'I is the only little girl, and you is the only little

dog,' she said to Bounce, as if that in itself made a bond between them.

It all ended in an invitation to breakfast for Bounce from Ada, seconded by Ada's mother, whereupon Peggy ran off and fetched one of her numerous lunch-baskets to contribute to the feast. It chanced to contain boiled ham, a plum cake, and crackers. Bounce took a seat at the end of the table, which jutted on the gangway, but changed his position when his tail had been twice trodden upon by people passing to and fro with teapots, and dishes of eggs and bacon, for their various tables.

Peggy had left him with his new friends while she went to look if Mrs. Sweeny were getting up. She found her already dressed, and armed with a bright little kettle which she was about to take to the kitchen to make tea for herself and Peggy.

'I know what it will be!' she said to her young companion. 'The cook-stove will be crowded all over with other people's kettles; and by the time there is room for mine, the fire'll be gone low, and I shan't be able to find the cordwood; and all the best tables'll be taken. That comes of having a dog, Peggy. If you hadn't been playing with Bounce, maybe you'd have boiled the kettle.

First come first served in train kitchens! I mind when I came out from the old country, and travelled colonist, how my kettle got shoved on one side by first one woman and then another, so she could get the hottest place. I was a young thing then, and let myself be done out of my rights. I'm not going to do it this trip—me, with a second-class ticket!

Peggy explained that she was 'new to this job,' and that after she had seen her way about, she would always get breakfast ready. This mollified Mrs. Sweeny considerably, and she became quite cheerful, till she discovered that Peggy had given away her particular lunch-basket by mistake.

'There, now!' she exclaimed. 'To think that out of all those lunch-baskets you should pick the one I packed myself special! Lucky the pound of tea wasn't in it! Eh, dear, dear! Saints be merciful!'

'All my lunch-baskets are for both of us, you know,' Peggy reminded her; 'and I dare say when we open them we shall find nice boiled ham somewhere.'

'Bless the dear child!' exclaimed Mrs. Sweeny, patting Peggy on the shoulder. 'Gorra I'm just a silly old woman, and my bark is worse than my bite! Don't you see

I only set store by those things in that lunch-basket because they came from my own home, and I figure I am a bit sore about leaving Mick and the boys, even if I am going to see my folks in the old country. I was always fretting to see the old country again, and now I guess I am going to fret to be back in the prairie. The prairie gets a sort of grip on you! It is as Mick says. I'm never satisfied!'

Peggy caught the gleam of tears in Mrs. Sweeny's eyes, and being Peggy, she gave the fat little woman a good hug. Mrs. Sweeny was certainly fat, and she was ever so much shorter in stature than tall, slim Peggy.

They managed to find a table on which to lay their breakfast. Indeed there was quite a choice, for the train was not crowded at all.

In spring Canadians do not usually make a trip to the old country. In the 'Fall' a crowd may be looked for. The table they chose was near to that of little Ada's mother, where Bounce was being alternately petted and fed. Mrs. Sweeny soon made friends with Ada's mother, whose name she learnt was Pickrell, and the discovery was quickly made that they were all to sail in the

Victorian. Ada's joy knew no bounds. She and dear Bounce would be in the ship together.

When Winnipeg was reached the conductor told Peggy that she could give Bounce a good run on the platform, as they would be making a long stay. Of course Ada made one of the party. Every one got out of the train, and some even risked a run into the town.

Peggy posted three picture post cards: one to her mother, one to her father, and one to Jo. Then, at the last moment, she remembered Jake, and ran back to the book-stall to buy one for him. She only just got in time with it, for the great bell on the engine was clanging as she and Bounce rushed to board the train.

All rosy and panting, she reached the first compartment, to receive a scolding from Mrs. Sweeny. 'To think of your running back like that, Peggy!' she cried. 'What would I have done if you'd been left behind?'

CHAPTER VIII

COMBAT WITH A BEAR

It was at Kenora that Bounce very nearly justified one of Mrs. Sweeny's prophecies. The train made a long stop there. Kenora is a beautiful spot of earth, rich in pine woods and lakes, rich, too, in sumptuous summer abodes of wealthy New Yorkers. One of these fine houses had grounds that wandered down to the railway line, and in these grounds a young and lively bear was rolling. He was at the end of a long chain, the other end of which was fastened to a tree. Bounce spied him from the platform of the train, and promptly went in pursuit. Possibly he mistook the bear for one of his old enemies—a prairie wolf. Anyway he was eager for a fight. Peggy ran after the dog, but not so quickly as a tall, lean Westerner who had seen and understood. He got the dog away from young Bruin in the most dexterous fashion, and the dog followed at

his heels in quite astonishing servility for so spirited a beast. Peggy raced up the platform to meet them, thanking the stranger for rescuing her dog. The stranger laughed amusedly. 'Guess he's my dog,' he remarked. 'Knew him in a moment before I'd seen the gammy leg. Wondered where the Sam-Hill he'd got to! Lost him out Alberta way months ago. He's grown some, but I knew him.'

Oh!' cried Peggy, her eyes filling with tears, 'don't take him away from me! He was going to the old country with me. I've had him quite a time. We found him in our cellar way back in Saskatchewan. He was starving—and his poor paw gone, and the place bleeding, and——'

'He'd had another tussle with a wolf then, and hurt the place where his paw had been. It was healed up when I lost him. Never struck such a pup for tackling wolves. He must have boarded a train to have got to Saskatchewan. Oh, he's equal to that or anything else! He's a born adventurer, ain't you, Buck?'

Bounce wagged his tail in acknowledgement of these compliments. It was clear that he had neither forgotten his old master nor his old name.

'And as to water,' went on the old master, 'I never saw a collie swim as he does if he strikes a lake where there are geese. Maybe you haven't seen him swim? Gee! he beats a retriever! Guess there's some retriever in him.'

But Peggy was scarcely listening; she was patting Bounce, and tears were falling actually now. It did seem so dreadful to have to part with Bounce!

Mrs. Sweeny, Mrs. Pickrell, and Ada joined the group at that moment, and Mrs. Sweeny asked Peggy if she had not warned her that the dog would jump off the train and 'quit on them.'

'This man is Bounce's old master,' sobbed Peggy, 'and I've got to lose him!'

At these words little Ada burst into tears too.

'Quit squealing, the pair of you!' commanded the stranger. 'I'll make the young lady a present of the dog! Gee! he's a dog worth having—and, maybe, worth losing too, though you don't understand that. He's got the hunting fever born with him, and many a five dollars has gone from my pocket to another's on account of his mistaking folk's stock for coyotes.'

'But you are sure Bounce won't fret after

you now he has seen you?' Peggy asked in trepidation.

'Well, now,' said the Westerner, with an amused smile, 'I don't figure the Back—or Bounce, as you call him—would get off his feed if he left me here. Guess he quit on me, not liking my methods. You see I had to try to train him not to go for stock, and he didn't take kindly to it—nor did he learn! Such a pup I never came across! Looks like a collic, sure; but I don't know what he is. Bit of "Husky," maybe; bit of retriever perhaps, by the way he takes the water. But, there! I give him to you.'

'You're a nice man!' Ada said, at which the Westerner laughed a good deal. Perhaps he was thinking that he had not often been called that. He was a lumberman, and his life had been one of fierce struggle and hardship. Yet, to his own great surprise, he picked up Ada and kissed her. Then setting her down, he produced a dollar bill from a wad, and told her to buy candy with it.

'All aboard!'

The incident was ended.

Once more the great Atlantic train was hurrying on to Montreal. There was every

now and then a delicious perfume of hlae, in which Peggy delighted. The conductor had told her that the open observation car, at the back of the train, was only for the use of those who had tourist tickets, but that the first-class passengers had taken a liking to Bounce, and so, if she and the dog and the 'kid' liked to go there sometimes he wasn't going to see them. He had ended by bestowing a prodigious wink on Peggy.

So the happy trio were often under the red-and-white awning, where a few folks who were 'some,' as Peggy expressed it, made much of them. As to these 'dude' folks (that was Mrs. Sweeney's name for them), the welcome they accorded to Peggy and Ada and Bounce was not altogether disinterested, for the trio helped not a little to lessen the monotony of a long railway journey. One 'fine lady,' whose hands were 'white as milk' (so Peggy reported), and whose fingers shone with wonderful jewels, said to another 'fine lady' that she would give a small fortune to have Peggy's wonderful hair, which made Peggy think her rather foolish; to her those immensely long thick braids were a nuisance. Her glossy dark hair was inclined to curl, and so was difficult to comb out and plait smoothly. She was as yet quite unaware that the

natural wave her hair took on each side of the middle parting was very pretty and becoming. She herself adored little Ada's golden locks, and wished that her own hair was yellow. The colouring of the ripe corn-fields had always enchanted her, and Ada's hair reminded her of ripe corn.

Ada required constant watching, for she climbed with the agility of a little monkey. She had a mania for climbing, and on more than one occasion she had, in the twinkling of an eye, put herself into danger of toppling over the rail of the observation car. It was on the last of these occasions that Bounce seemed to meditate deeply, putting his pointed nose down, and his head on one side, a torn ear uppermost. He seemed to arrive at a definite decision, for he rose, shook himself, and grabbed Ada's dress, pulling her to the middle of the car, and far away from the rails. If she moved towards a rail he again caught her by the dress. He had evidently come to the conclusion that human beings did not know the first thing about looking after a child. He constituted himself guard-in-chief of Ada. The fine ladies laughed until they cried when they observed all this. 'The dog is more than a dog,' said one of them.

'The man who used to be his master said

he sure didn't know what Bounce was,' commented Peggy innocently. 'He said he ought have a bit of retriever, and most likely a bit of wolf.'

Then the men, who were the husbands of the fine ladies, and who had been quietly smoking while they scanned two-days-old newspapers up to now, burst into laughter.

'He's got a bit of human common sense too,' said one of them. 'Mongrels have mostly more sense and more points than the thoroughbreds.'

'He's a collic,' Peggy pronounced. 'Look at his coat!'

Peggy was very proud of her dog's coat, and made his toilet every day most carefully. She did not like Bounce to be called a mongrel either.

'There's a bit of a retriever curl in his hair,' the other man said; 'and his head is wolf; but his tail is all collic.'

Bounce rose, shook himself, and held up his pawless leg in mute protest, whereupon one of the fine ladies bestowed a piece of candy on him.

'He's a dear, anyway,' she said, and Peggy was propitiated.

At last Montreal was reached. The train had arrived only just in time to catch the

Victorian and the *Lake Manitoba*, both ships sailing from the port that night.

Mrs. Sweeny was once more in a fluster. She declared that the only safe thing was to go down to the docks at once and get on board. She also expressed a fear that they would never find the docks till the *Victorian* had sailed. The station-agent, however, told her that she might quite well have a look round Montreal, for two buses conveyed passengers from the station to the docks to catch the *Victorian* and the *Lake Manitoba* at seven o'clock in the evening. The *Victorian* would sail at ten o'clock in the evening, so, as it was now only nine o'clock in the morning, there was no kind of hurry. He also volunteered the information that no meals would be served on board till breakfast next morning.

This decided matters, and Mrs. Sweeny and Peggy, accompanied by Mrs. Pickrell and Bounce, left the big station to wander round and see the sights, and to get meals at a restaurant when they felt hungry.

The magnificent cathedral, which immediately came into view, nearly took Peggy's breath away. The only large building she had seen up to now was Eton's store at Winnipeg. Oh, if only Jo could see this

wonderful sight! That was what Peggy was thinking. She had to think that a great many times before she left wonderful Montreal. She satisfied herself somewhat by purchasing a fine book of views and dispatching it to Jo. She also wrote a letter in a post office and sent that off.

Bounce behaved very well on the whole in Montreal, though he did 'spoil for a fight' with more than one dog which crossed his path. Mrs. Sweeny was quite sure that Bounce would get himself (and them) into trouble before they got on board. But this did not happen. He did, however, resent being put into the hold of the ship for the night, and Peggy wept as she heard him howling. Mrs. Sweeny declared he howled exactly like a timber-wolf.

Early next morning Peggy, who had not slept a wink for fretting over his imprisonment, went down and fetched him for his exercise on deck, where he made friends with sailors and with gorgeous officers too by his usual method of presenting his damaged leg for inspection. The second day on the St. Lawrence he had managed somehow, with Peggy's aid, plus little Ada's, to get the freedom of the deck during day-time, much as he had got the freedom of the train.

CHAPTER IX

BOUNCE BECOMES A HERO

At Quebec something happened. Here the great ship stopped to pick up the mail-bags. There was not time for the passengers to climb up to the heights and explore the beautiful old historic town, but many went on shore. Peggy, Ada, her mother, and Bounce among the number. Mrs. Sweeny had refused to quit the ship, and declared that she was quite sure the ship would move off before those who had been so foolish as to land could get back on deck.

Mrs. Pickrell, holding Ada's hand lightly, walked along the landing-stage, looking with interest at everything. Then--no one knew how it happened, but little Ada had slipped away from her mother, and then--there was a cry and a splash! The little girl had fallen into the river.

In a second Bounce was in after her. Luckily, she had not fallen between the ship

and the landing-stage, but in a clear space beyond, or in all probability both Ada and Bounce would have been drowned. As it was there was risk enough of that, for though poor Bounce had got the child's clothes in his teeth, he swam desperately round and round, finding no place to land.

Mrs. Pickrell and Peggy shrieked for help, beating the air with their hands. But a boatman was fast making for the spot, and very soon had the unconscious child and the trembling dog in safety.

Ada soon recovered her senses when in the hands of the doctor on board; and he said she would be none the worse when once she had got over her fright. But Bounce found himself a hero. Willing hands dried him. A steward brought him a bowl of hot beef-tea which was just being served for the passengers. An American gentleman of an enterprising disposition at once proposed that the passengers should subscribe to a silver collar for Bounce, on which should be engraved his name and an account of his brave deed. This idea was taken up eagerly, the American undertaking to see the thing through personally. He knew how to 'get a move on,' and dollars did not matter to him. He measured Bounce's neck, and

sent off a 'wireless' with full particulars to Liverpool, and then told Peggy he guessed that collar would meet them at the landing-stage at Liverpool—which, in fact, it did: for money can do most things!

Every one who had a camera photographed Bounce. He was photographed alone, and again with little Ada, and again with Peggy. The Commander himself photographed the dog. A journalist who happened to be on board wrote an account of Bounce's brave act for a London daily. Yes, Bounce the footless, Bounce the nondescript, Bounce the outlaw, had become famous!

'I always thought that dog would bring us luck,' said Mrs. Sweeny, whereupon Peggy burst into laughter, remembering all the adverse sayings of Mrs. Sweeny regarding Bounce.

'I am sure I see nothing to laugh at, Peggy,' said Mrs. Sweeny, frowning: 'I've sure got the gift of prophecy, though Mick, way back home, did use to call me a prophet of evil. By the same token, I expect he's forgot all about setting that hen!'

When they got out into the Atlantic, Mrs. Sweeny promptly took to her berth, and declared she was going to die. She grew quite angry when contradicted on this point,

and received Peggy's ministrations as if they were made on purpose to thwart her wish to quit this world. She said she wished she was Jonah, and then perhaps they would throw her overboard, and end her misery. In a day or two, however, she had recovered, took her place once more at table, and really enjoyed the rest of the voyage.

Peggy had the great joy of seeing an iceberg - another thing to tell Jo.

After the first outburst of grief at parting with her parents and brother, Peggy had suffered no pangs of homesickness. The novelty of everything took all her attention. There was no time to think the thoughts which bring sighs and tears. But as the *Victorian* neared Liverpool, Peggy began to realize that very soon she would be bidding good-bye to Mrs. Sweeny and Mrs. Pickrell and Ada, and that she would be finding herself among strangers. Oddly enough, the magic of the new life that had appealed to her romantic little heart so powerfully away back in the prairie, seemed to have vanished as English shores grew near. It was still desirable, beautiful even, but the enchantment had fled. She began to realize that she would be in a new home, where all would be strange. Above all, she began to realize

that five thousand miles would lie between her and the peaceful little prairie farm. Vague fears crowded in upon her.

Mrs. Sweeny rallied her upon her glum looks. 'Say, Peggy!' she exclaimed one sunny morning, as they leaned on the rail looking at the glimmer of shining green that was Ireland afar off, 'Say, Peggy! what's come to you? Your looks would turn a dairy of milk sour!'

Peggy shrugged her shoulders, and gave a petulant toss to one of the long pigtails which hung over her shoulder. 'Guess I don't like leaving you all!' she said. 'Seems like I don't fancy the old country so much as I did.'

'Don't be such a softy, Peggy!' Mrs. Sweeny remarked unsympathetically. 'You are going to have the time of your life! A fine house with servants, and fine clothes, and a motor-car. You talked enough about it way back in the prairie! As for your not fancying the old country, you sure haven't seen it yet. But, look over there! There's the Emerald Isle where I was born, and where my Mick came from. It's sure the loveliest spot on God's earth! Old Ireland where the grass grows green!'

Ireland as seen from the sea on a sunny

morning is indeed a wonderful bit of colour. Peggy declared it was an enchanted isle, like one she had read of long ago in a fairy tale.

'It's sure in Ireland that fairies live,' Mrs. Sweeny affirmed—and she believed it too. The beliefs of early childhood cling like a perfume to later years. 'Ah!' she cried, 'I guess I'll have to make a trip over there before I go back, just to set eyes on the old village where I was born. But never a one of the old friends will I see, for they are sure lying in the churchyard!'

'It's you that's looking glum now, Mrs. Sweeny,' Peggy told her, 'so you can't talk about me any more. Let's go and pack our bits of things in the cabin, or we'll be there at Liverpool before we're ready.'

'Sure thing!' replied Mrs. Sweeny; 'and, Peggy, do you know some one has swiped my plaid shawl out of the cabin? I've been to the purser about it.'

Then some one laughed.

Mrs. Sweeny looked round, and a gentleman pointed towards a coil of rope. There upon the shawl lay Bounce, looking very fierce indeed.

'So you are the thief, are you?' cried Mrs. Sweeny, advancing upon the dog. Then

Bounce behaved in a very extraordinary fashion. He jumped up and dragged the shawl along the deck, laying it at its owner's feet, and then curveted and gave a series of joyous barks, as if trying to explain something, and most certainly expecting commendation.

'He's not the thief!' Peggy pronounced. 'He's discovered some one with your shawl and he has taken it away, and has been lying on it to keep it safe. That's it!'

Bounce barked joyously, as much as to say that Peggy had stated the case correctly. This proved to be true.

When Mrs. Sweeny was given the full account of Bounce's rescue of her shawl just as another passenger was putting it into her kitsack, she at once went off to the barber's shop (where almost anything can be bought—at a price), and purchased some chocolates for the dog as a reward. Chocolates were Bounce's favourite sweetmeat, and he got a good many on this voyage, for if he saw any one eating them he at once advanced and showed his pawless leg.

Of course, the passenger declared that she had no knowledge of how the shawl came to be in her cabin, and insisted that she was

packing in such a hurry that she did not notice what she put into her sack. Mrs. Sweeny accepted the explanation, but had her own private opinion about the affair.



MR FITZGERALD IS MAKING A BOW AT THE GAL WITH
HIS STRAW HAT

I'd know him among a thousand, though they said he'd changed. Understand, if you don't find your uncle, you'll sure have to go to Hastings with me and Pat and telegraph to your folks.'

But Uncle William, stout, florid, and kindly, was close to the foot of the gangway, holding up a red handkerchief. Peggy shyly came up with her dog, to be greeted in the heartiest way by her uncle, who bestowed a sounding kiss upon her.

'I'm right glad to see you, Peggy,' he said; 'and is this your dog? What a grand collar, to be sure!'

Peggy flushed up with pleasure. She liked Uncle William at sight. 'I'll sure tell you all about that collar, uncle,' she said; 'but this is Mrs. Sweeny, who has taken care of me.'

'How do you do, ma'am?' said Uncle William. 'I thank you kindly for taking care of my niece, and I hope you'll come and see us before you go back. John told me about you.'

'I sure will, Mr. Batten,' replied Mrs. Sweeny warmly. She, too, liked the look of Uncle William. 'But I figure we'll have to get a move on and see to our luggage. I saw my box broken open.'

'We'd best look slippy, then,' retorted Uncle William. 'I'll look to it all for you.'

Peggy pulled Mrs. Sweeny's sleeve and said, 'Where are Mrs. Pickrell and little Ada? I can't see them anywhere. We must say good-bye to them.'

'That is just what we can't do,' Mrs. Sweeny told her. 'They quit on us on purpose. Mrs. Pickrell said that Ada would cry so in parting with Bounce.'

'Eh? What?' cried Uncle William. 'Who are they?'

Peggy explained.

'Why should the child not come on a visit to us?' demanded Uncle William. 'Our house is big enough, goodness knows. We'll try to find them in the customs. They'll have to go there, and little Ada won't need to say good-bye if her mother is sensible. I shall ask them to come to Dulwich just so soon as they like! What's a big house for, I'd like to know, if it isn't to have friends come to stay in it? Your friends are my friends, mind that, Peggy.'

Sure enough they found Mrs. Pickrell and Ada in the customs, and Uncle William made friends with them, and gave his invitation, which was accepted. They were going

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up North now, but on their way back they would come to Dulwich.

Uncle William took little Ada up in his arms, while he saw to all the business for all of them. He got a new cord for Mrs. Sweeny's box, though Patrick was running about trying vainly to get one. He got tea-baskets to put in the train with them, and fruit for Ada, and saw them all off as if he were an old friend, instead of a new acquaintance. Then he told Peggy they were to stay the night in Liverpool, and he was going to buy her a new coat and skirt and hat to travel up in; for, he explained with a chuckle, 'These girls of mine lay so much store by fashion, and I'm not going to give 'em the chance to be turning up their noses at prime-made logs—not but what you look real nice'—he added hastily, 'but with my girls, Millicent in particular, it's more to be in the latest fashion than to look nice. I do believe, Peggy, that if it were the fashion to wear coal-scuttles on heads, instead of hats, our Milly and Fan would wear them' They can scarcely put one foot before the other now, their skirts are so tight. We won't get you one as bad as that, but we'll have to get a narrow one, I suppose. How's your father?—and

mother !—and Jo ? I'd have liked to have had Jo, but he liked cows better than drapery. There's more money in drapery, properly handled. Peggy !—but, there ! money doesn't always spell for happiness. I was happier in the bit house in a row, where mother cooked the meals—your aunt, you know. The food isn't nearly as tasty now to my mind, with them grand servants cooking it, and watching us eat it.'

Peggy but half understood. Of one thing, however, she was sure, and that was, that Uncle William was a dear. She realized this more as time went on.

They put up at a little unfashionable hotel, where Uncle William had been in the habit of staying during the years when he had 'travelled' for a firm. Here he knew that home comforts, as he understood them, were to be had ; also—and this was important—Bounce would be allowed to be in the room with them, and would, moreover, have a good dinner under their eyes.

The bustle of Liverpool frightened Peggy a little. It was so very unlike Montreal. But she felt very happy and at home when she and Uncle William sat down to a substantial meal in a cosy, low-ceilinged room, where Bounce also was dining sumptuously, with

a newspaper for a table-cloth on the carpet.

Peggy observed that her uncle chuckled like a schoolboy when he saw a perfect stack of fried onions arrive to eat with a thick steak. 'There's chicken for you, Peggy,' he said laughing. 'I always have onions when I come here. The girls at home won't let me have them there. They say they smell the house out; but you don't mind, do you?'

'Sure thing!' cried Peggy. She was thinking it was rather hard that her uncle could not have what he liked at home, but she said nothing. Every now and then she studied her uncle's face, when he was not looking. She wanted to find a likeness to her father, but failed. To begin with, her uncle was stout and wore a beard, which was greying fast, though his scanty hair was what is known as 'sandy.' Her father was lean and brown, and his hair was still dark. He was clean shaven too. Her uncle glanced up, and then Peggy flushed, for she noticed that he had grey eyes wonderfully like her own. This pleased her, and she smiled.

'A penny for your thoughts, little girl,' he said.

'Your eyes are just like mine,' she told him. 'Dad's are not; isn't it funny?'

'I think it a fine compliment to me,' he said. 'I never knew I had beautiful eyes before; but if they are like yours they must be!'

Peggy blushed rosy, and was glad of a diversion caused by Bounce, who having finished all upon his plate, came up to Uncle William and held up his pawless leg.

'There's artfulness for you!' cried Uncle William, replenishing the plate. 'That dog wasn't born yesterday! I wonder, Peggy, if he'll stay here quietly and sleep after his big dinner? You see, we two have to go shopping, and he can't be used to traffic.'

'He'll stay, sure,' answered Peggy, 'if I give him something of mine to take care of. He'll know I'm coming back.'

'That's all right, then,' said Uncle William; 'and as soon as you can get ready we'll be off.'

'I'll get a move on,' said Peggy. 'Guess I'll be ready so quick you'll think I've always been ready.' Uncle William laughed at this (to him) odd speech.

Peggy was as good as her word, however, and astonished her uncle by her quickness.

'Why, Milly and Fan take half an hour

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dressing up,' he told her. 'You'll have to teach them the way you do it, dear!'

A very merry couple they were as they set out on their shopping expedition. Peggy felt as if she had known her uncle all her life instead of only a few hours.

CHAPTER XI

THE PALACE OF HER DREAMS

'HERE we are at home!' cried Uncle William, as the taxi raced up a carriage drive between tall firs that looked like sentinels. Peggy saw before her an immense square house, with a multitude of long, narrow windows, all beautifully draped with long white curtains. The upper windows had short blinds too, each surmounted by a wide band of brass, to which the setting sun gave a blinding glitter. She saw a big important-looking porch, with fluted pillars, and three semicircular steps which were of marble. In front of this unlovely mansion was a great arid-looking desert of gravel. At the back of the house, she was yet to learn, stretched a large old-world garden, with terraces and croquet lawns, and a white temple which was a sort of glorified summer-house. At the extreme end of the garden was a fir plantation. Then there was the

walled-in kitchen garden, with glass-houses running all down one side, in which she was to find wonderful flowers and grapes.

A very tall and smart parlourmaid flung open the door as the taxi stopped before the porch, and came forward to relieve Peggy of her small bag.

Peggy was a little surprised that her aunt and cousins did not come out to welcome her. Uncle William seemed to read her thoughts, for he whispered 'They think it grander to sit waiting in the drawing-room and have you shown in! Don't you mind! You'll soon get used to their ways. Mother has to do what Millicent tells her!'

Sure enough Peggy was conducted ceremoniously across the large square entrance hall to the drawing-room, and announced as 'Miss Margaret Ratten'

Uncle William somewhat spoiled the effect by pushing his way past the high-and-mighty maid and exclaiming, 'Here is Peggy, and I hope there's food coming soon, for we're mighty peckish.'

Mrs. Ratten, arrayed in a fine silk dress of a dead purple colour, advanced across the wilderness of pale pile carpet, and bestowed a kiss on Peggy that was very warm and motherly despite the stuff surroundings.

'I'm very glad to see you, Peggy dear,' she said with sincerity. 'I hope you are going to be very happy with us.'

'Sure thing, auntie,' responded Peggy, though she began to have her doubts. She would have doubted more had she happened to intercept the glance that Millicent shot at Fanny at the other end of the room. These two young ladies were amazed at their Canadian cousin's language and accent. They came up to greet her, however, as soon as their mother had 'got through,' as Peggy would have said.

It was Uncle William who made the introductions in his own way. 'This is Millicent,' he said, 'and you notice she has her hair up; she is seventeen, you see, and a woman grown, so she thinks! And this one is Fanny—Frances being her real name—and she is your age, so you ought to hit it off! She is a bit of a Tomboy.'

'How do you do, Peggy?' said Millicent, extending a white limp hand, on which shone a half-hoop ring, set with pearls. A kiss was exchanged, as seemed proper to the occasion. Fanny kissed her cousin more warmly. She did not know it, but she had a vague fellow-feeling with Peggy, who was sure to be lectured by Millicent, as she herself was.

Millicent, it very soon became evident to quick-witted Peggy, was in a sense master and mistress of this grand establishment.

All this time Bounce had kept quite close to Uncle William. He was waiting for the right moment to present his pawless leg for inspection. Oddly enough, neither Mrs. Ratten nor the girls had noticed him at all. Perhaps they were too absorbed in a critical scrutiny of their cousin. But in a few moments Millicent's eyes caught sight of him, and she exclaimed, 'Oh, father! how can you bring that dog into the drawing-room! I'll ring at once and have him taken to an outhouse.'

Bounce advanced and presented his injured leg. He seemed to understand that banishment was in the wind. 'How dreadful!' pronounced Millicent. 'Really it is enough to make one ill to see that leg! How could you bring him, Peggy! I could not bear to have a mutilated animal like that near me!'

'Now, now, Milly, stow that!' broke out Uncle William, making a desperate effort to show himself master in his own house.

Bounce deliberately turned his back on Millicent.

'He has got a lovely collar,' said Fanny.

'He's lovely himself,' declared Peggy, flushing. 'Say, Millicent, how would you like it if you lost a foot and people said they couldn't bear you near them?'

'I am not a dog,' pronounced Millicent, and then abruptly changed the subject by asking Peggy if she would like tea before going to her room, or prefer to remove the dust of travel first.

'I guess I want some tea in the worst way,' answered Peggy, 'but please don't send Bounce away. He'd be so miserable, and Uncle William has a lot of hay coming for him to burrow in, same as way back home. He can go to bed in it then.'

'Oh, very well, dear,' acceded Millicent; 'just this once—only you see this drawing-room is not a farm kitchen, and if I allow the dog to come in one time, he will want to come another. Think what a mess he would make if it had been raining!'

It was not a very nice beginning, truly!

Mrs. Ratten looked very nervous. She was always nervous these days, for, alas! she was not sure of her 'itches,' and suffered many things at the hands of her elder daughter in this regard, as in fact in regard to deportment generally. She herself frankly liked the idea of being a *grande dame*, and having

a fine house and servants, and she did try to live up to it ! But she sometimes fancied she could play hostess better if Millicent's eye were not always upon her !

Millicent it was who poured out the tea from a fine silver teapot, which was set on a fine silver tray.

Peggy began a series of blunders as soon as tea was over. She quite naturally gathered the cups and plates together.

'Oh, my dear Peggy, the servants do all that !' exclaimed her elder cousin.

Peggy flushed at the tone.

'I think it nice and kind of you to want to help,' said Uncle William, trying to cover Peggy's confusion.

'We always do it on the prairie,' stammered Peggy.

'This is Dulwich, dear,' her aunt reminded her. 'You will be waited on 'ere.'

Millicent frowned at her mother.

'Come along, Peggy, and see your room,' said Fanny, who was rather sorry for her cousin, and considered that Millicent was in a very 'nasty' mood.

'Yes, go, Peggy,' put in Uncle William, 'I'll look after Bounce. I can see his load of hay coming up the drive. Lucky you told me he liked what you call a hay pile, and

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was able to telephone down to the stables for it.'

When Peggy and Fanny had gone, Millicent made a despairing gesture. 'To-morrow is our "At Home" day,' she said. 'Really I think Peggy had best not appear till I can manage to civilize her a bit. There is no knowing how she will behave!'

'Once and for all, Milly, Peggy is not going to be kept out of anything,' thundered Uncle William, really asserting himself this time. 'This house is mine, I beg to remind you. If I'd my time over again, I'd have kept in a little house. Your high faluting ways make me sick, they do!'

'Really, father!' exclaimed Millicent turning very pale, as she rose to leave the room.

'I think, dear, it was a pity to say some of them there things just so soon as Peggy sets foot in the 'ouse,' ventured Mrs. Ratten. 'You could teach 'er by degrees like. I wouldn't 'ave 'er made miserable for worlds!'

Millicent shuddered - not at the reproof, however, but at her mother'sitchless speech

'Oh, well!' she remarked with an air of finality. 'Most people have a cross, I believe. I know I have mine!'

She left the room, wafting the scent of

violets to her father's nostrils as she passed him.

When she had gone, Uncle William came and put a caressing hand on his wife's silk-clad shoulders. 'Never mind, old dear,' he said, 'don't you fret about Milly's ways.'

Mrs. Ratten put her head on her husband's shoulder and shed a few tears. 'I some'ow—sometimes wish we was back in the bit 'onse at Peckham,' she said.

CHAPTER XII

'THIS OUTFIT?'

WHEN Peggy saw her pretty white bedroom, she forgot all the discomfort she had felt in the drawing-room.

'Oh!' she cried in ecstasy; 'what a lovely, lovely room! and is it to be all my own? I guess I'll stay awake to admire it! Look at that lace quilt with blue silk under it! I figure I have to fold that up before I get in bed!'

'The servants do all that,' Fanny told her. 'And, Peggy, I am glad you like the room: and don't you mind Milly! she is always going for all of us. It's her way: but she is really very kind-hearted. What are you going to wear for dinner? I can hear them bringing up your box.'

'You shall help me choose,' said Peggy, giving her cousin a hug. 'I like you, Fanny, and I want you to like me!'

'I do—so there!' retorted Fanny. 'And oh! what a lot of hair you have! I wish mine was long!'

Fanny glanced at herself in the mirror, and saw a round freckled face with a pair of chestnut-coloured eyes looking wistfully out of it, and reddish hair parted on one side and puffed out at the sides with combs.

'Your hair is a much prettier colour than mine,' said Peggy, staring at the looped braids at the back surmounted by a huge white bow.

'But it isn't long,' Fanny lamented. 'Why, you could sit on yours!'

'I guess I often do, and get a horrid pull,' laughed Peggy.

Then there came a knock on the door. Fanny said, 'Come in,' and Peggy's battered box appeared, carried in by a page-boy, assisted by a housemaid. This housemaid (who was a replica of the parlourmaid Peggy had first seen) asked for the young lady's keys.

'What for, anyway?' demanded Peggy, much puzzled.

'Danc wants to unpack and put away your things,' Fanny explained.

'Oh!' laughed Peggy; 'guess I'll do my own chores!'

'Chores?' echoed Fanny, mystified in her turn.

'I think the young lady means she would prefer to do the unpacking herself, miss,' Dane ventured.

'That's so,' agreed Peggy; 'way back in Canada we don't ask other people to do our chores.'

Dane discreetly withdrew, hiding a smile of amusement not unmixed with contempt.

'You ought to have let Dane unpack,' Fanny told her cousin. 'It will be an awful bore; she might at least have uncorred the box.'

But capable Peggy very soon had the cord off, and the box open. Then with pride she held up her gowns and blouses for inspection one by one. She was a little disappointed at the want of appreciation on the part of her cousin; especially so regarding the figured *delaine* 'best frock,' which had been so much admired by her friends in the prairie.

'Shall I wear that one?' Peggy asked a little wistfully.

'I suppose so,' answered Fanny grudgingly. 'I suppose you haven't a proper dinner-frock? We always dress for dinner—all except father—and he—undresses this hot weather!'

'Gee!' cried Peggy, 'does he wear his bed-things?'

'Dear me, no!' was the laughing rejoinder. 'I mean he takes his coat off, and dines in shirt-sleeves. It breaks Millicent's heart! Father never will do what she wants about conventions, though mother—tries to! Poor mother! I don't think mother is very happy in the trying either. Mother is a round thing in a square hole, or a square thing in a round hole. Now Millicent is worrying her to wear a transformation because her hair is thin on the top. Mother hates false hair, she says, and is sure it would come off accidentally, or get on one side. But she will end in wearing it, I expect' I back Millicent. But I shall have to go and put on my dress now, or I shall be late: there goes the dressing-gong.'

Alone in her room, Peggy made a tour of inspection. The walls and the carpet were blue. The paint and the furniture white. There was (to Peggy) a most wonderful wardrobe, with a huge mirror in it, and drawers, and shelves. She had never seen anything like it. Then the toilet table called for attention, with its oval mirror, surmounted by a cupid, its tiny brass-handled drawers—above all the heavy sheet of plate

glass that was screwed down over a lovely lace toilet cover, so that it could never be soiled. Then there was the little low couch, and the basket chair, both furnished with blue cushions. Truly it was a room for a princess, she told herself. To crown all, the air that came in through the open windows was laden with the scent of roses—red roses, that nodded outside the window frame, and seemed to bid her welcome. She was glad that her room was at the back of the house, for she could look out on the garden instead of the desert of gravel. She recalled her room in the prairie, with its lumber walls, its pointed unceilinged roof, spanned by rafters, its little window that was facing the far-away Moose Mountains, the primitive home-made furniture, the cowhides on the red-painted floor. What a difference! Truly the splendours of Buckingham House were beyond all her Arabian Nights' dreams! She had not yet seen the stately dining-room, with its black oak, its big oil-paintings, its shining glass and silver; nor the bathroom, which had a white marble bath, and white porcelain walls, and a heated brass rail running all along one side to hold bath-sheets and towels. Mrs. Ratten's household appointments were very up-to-date.

Peggy had just got into her *delaine* dress, and had put white ribbon on her hair, when Millicent entered, a vision of fashion. Her pale gold hair was puffed and waved and decorated with glittering combs. Her white *crêpe de Chine* gown, cut slightly low at the neck in front, and having elbow sleeves, was so fitted to her figure that with the little tail that swept the carpet she suggested a mermaid to Peggy, who had seen a picture of one. She wore a long gold chain divided into sections by turquoises, and on her arms were gold bracelets.

'Ready, dear?' she asked languidly. 'Let me look at you! Ah!—well we are dining *en famille* to-night, so that will do: but, darling, we must have your hands manicured!'

'Gee!' cried Peggy; 'what is that, anyway?'

Millicent explained.

Peggy examined her hands, and then looked at her cousin's. 'Guess you've never done any work with yours,' she remarked.

'Not housework, certainly,' was the rejoinder.

Then a gong made itself heard, and the girls went down to the dining-room, where two black-gowned, white-aproned and white-

capped maids stood waiting. Mrs. Ratten, now clad in a tobacco-coloured evening gown, sat at one end of the table. Uncle William sat defiantly in shirt-sleeves at the other. Fanny, in a simple white muslin (which nevertheless had cost pounds!) sat on one side, and a place for Peggy was laid next to her. Millicent was to sit alone in her glory, opposite.

It was still daylight, but candles under rose-coloured silk shades were alight upon the table. Millicent had long ago decided that candle light, was more distinguished than electric light with which the room was furnished. Uncle William always rebelled at this arrangement, declaring that he could not see to eat. But Peggy thought it lovely. The silver bowls of red roses harmonized so beautifully with the tiny candle-shades and with the table-centre.

'Mother, I needn't have my music lesson to-morrow, need I?' said Fanny, when she had finished her soup. 'It is Peggy's first day here, and I want to take her out in the car.'

'You can do both,' pronounced her sister, not giving Mrs. Ratten a chance to reply. 'You are very lazy, Fanny. You never passed even your Oxford Local at the High

School. Now you are always trying to get out of your music lesson, or your drawing lesson, or your dancing.'

'Oh, what a fib!' exclaimed Fanny; 'and anyhow, it is for mother to say whether I can miss my music lesson -not you!'

Mrs. Ratten, meeting her elder daughter's eye, said hurriedly, 'You must take your music lesson as usual, Fanny; you can go out in the car as well.'

'I loved music lessons,' broke in Peggy; 'only I can't play much, because you need to practise some to play much, and I hadn't time with so many chores to do.'

Millicent frowned. Really it was most annoying to have Peggy talking about 'chores' before the servants. It was on a par with her father's talk about the shop. Millicent would have liked to obliterate the shop, though not the wealth it had brought.

Peggy went on, quite unconscious of having given offence.

'Father plays on the American organ of an evening, and Jo plays the violin. Jo plays to beat the band!'

'What is it you play, little Peggy?' inquired Uncle William from his end of the table, which was far from Peggy because the table was so very large.

'The American organ,' she replied, 'but I don't play good. Guess none of you would care about it.'

'You shall have piano lessons if you like,' said Uncle William.

'Gee!' cried Peggy, 'wouldn't I!'

Peggy's enthusiasm was quashed by her inability to know what to do with a dish which a maid was holding at her side. 'What am I to do with this outfit?' she inquired of the maid, who smiled in spite of herself.

'Take some!' advised Uncle William.

Peggy did so, and managed very well, remarking, 'You see we don't have things done like that way back home, and I'm kind of scared at new ways, but I guess I'll get the hang of it in time.'

Poor Millicent was inwardly groaning at the prospect of the At Home day to-morrow. What terrible solecism might not be expected from this Canadian cousin!

CHAPTER XIII

'A FASCINATING RATTEN'

THE people who attended Mrs. Ratten's At Homes, and ate her elaborate dinners, were almost entirely composed of retired tradesmen and their wives and families. There were the clergyman, the doctor, and their families certainly; but for the most part, it must be owned the visitors had sprung from trade—successful trade, that meant a lavish show of money, in establishments, in dress, in horses and carriages, in motor-cars. But the greatest of all were the Bennin-Brights, who owned tea-gardens in Clona, and were so immensely rich that it was said they could pave the roads with gold if they wished to. They had a daughter called Pamela, who was Millicent's bosom friend. To her, in the morning after Peggy's arrival, Millicent confided her qualms regarding her Canadian cousin.

'Peggy is just a primitive young savage.'

she told Pamela, almost in tears. 'It is bad enough to put up with father's ways, and mother's shortcomings, but people are used to them. Peggy will disgrace us worse than all. Last night at dinner, when a dish was brought to her, she said to the maid, "What shall I do with this outfit?"—Think of it!'

But Pamela Bennan-Bright was shaking with laughter.

'Your cousin will amuse us to distraction,' she said, as soon as she recovered breath. 'I am dying to see her!'

'You will this afternoon,' retorted Millicent gloomily.

They had met in Dulwich village—to be exact, in the famous picture-gallery. It was a favourite meeting-spot for these two girls. Here they told each other their secrets—and other people's secrets too, when they had any, we are sorry to say. Pamela was sixteen, and therefore a year younger than Millicent, yet it was Pamela who 'led'. She was by far the cleverer of the two. Millicent's one pronounced characteristic was a vanity that amounted to a disease; a sort of rapacious monster, always hungry, and in restless search of food. She wanted of all things to be considered a 'society lady.' Millicent could

forgive readily any wrong done her, except a wound inflicted on her vanity : that she would go to her death without forgiving.

Pamela thoroughly understood this, and never allowed a hint of her knowledge on this point to escape her. She meanly played upon it, to her own advantage. She had done this systematically in the school days from which the two girls were just liberated. They had been together at the Dulwich High School, and afterwards for three months in France, and for a like period in Germany, to learn to speak languages they already knew well on paper. Pamela's besetting sin was greed. Despite the good allowance her father always gave her, she managed artfully to possess herself of a good deal of Millicent's. She moreover annexed in cunning fashion many of Millicent's trinkets, for Millicent was generous. How did Pamela do it ? Chiefly by the most brazen flattery. Unfortunately Millicent could swallow this, till in her intoxication of pride she imagined Pamela the dearest object of her affection and the most delightful girl in the world. It was quite enough for Pamela to cast longing eyes on any possession of Millicent's to obtain it immediately. Millicent never suspected her friend.

Just now, Pamela had set her heart on a novelty in the way of a ring which Millicent had upon her finger. It was a thin gold ring set with a single big pearl, and having a tiny diamond at the end of an extremely thin chain which dangled from it. Millicent had bought it from an old lady who was 'hard up.'

The girls were sitting very close, as was their habit, on one of those velvet-clad seats provided for visitors to this unique little picture-gallery. On the hand which Pamela caressed Millicent wore this curious ring. The thin gold chain moved here and there upon the slim white hand, and Pamela declared that the diamond at the end of it looked for all the world like a dewdrop on a white lily. 'You have such lovely hands, Milly !' she said, 'with a little sigh. 'They are the hands of an aristocrat.'

Millicent beamed. She would infinitely rather be considered aristocratic than beautiful.

'But there is such an air of breeding about all of you,' Pamela said softly. 'You must have had important ancestors, though you don't know about them.'

'I have often thought so,' answered the delighted and gratified Millicent. 'I feel

like a fish out of water in my surroundings. Imagine how I suffered when mother called Peggy's dog "a Nero!"'

'Why?' inquired her puzzled friend. 'There is nothing wrong about Nero!'

'Mother meant a *hero*!' Milhoent explained.

'Oh,' smiled Pamela, 'I see!'

'You don't know how I squirm under it,' Milhoent lamented. 'Your parents can speak English' and now there is Peggy, who is going to make us a laughing-stock, talking about the "chorus" she used to do on the farm in Canada. I always thought it a mistake to have her over here: but father insisted.'

'Never mind, *darang*!' said Pamela soothingly. 'Every one realizes what you are! Oh, that lovely little dewdrop! I shall hunt the jewellers' shops till I find one like it!'

Milhoent drew off the ring and dropped it into her friend's palm. 'You need not hunt, dear I'll give you this one. Really I am not so very attached to it. You will find it awkward with a glove.'

'What an angel you are!' cried Pamela, who was delighted to have achieved her purpose.

In the meantime Peggy and Bounce had

gone with the mutinous Fanny to the house of the teacher of music. Peggy elected to pass the time of the lesson in the fields at the back of the house where Fanny would be enduring what she called a whole hour of torment. Fanny was not by nature musical, but she was by nature lazy, unless she was playing tennis or hockey, when her energy was marvellous.

Peggy discovered a pony grazing in the field. Temptation assailed her. It seemed years since she had been on a horse's back. On the prairie no one would say a word of complaint if she took a ride on a horse she found grazing. Peggy did not hesitate. She was an old hand at catching horses. She was glad to be wearing the serge skirt she had brought from home, as it was not narrow. She had caught the pony, and was galloping round the field inside of three minutes, with Bounce loppiting behind on his three legs. She was very much astonished when she became aware that a groom was shouting at her angrily, while a gaunt elderly lady was shaking a folded parasol at her. Evidently the old lady owned the pony, and the hired man who was shouting had been told to stop her.

She brought the pony to a trot, and, guid-

ing him by little pushes on his head with her strong brown hand, came to a standstill before the old lady, dismounted with a surprising agility, and stood unabashed and with nothing of the culprit in her attitude, while she caressed the pony and smiled into the angry face of the pony's owner.

‘Say!’ she began with charming frankness, but was interrupted by the groom, who demanded her name and address, adding that he never saw such impudence.

‘Now don't you fly off the handle!’ Peggy said to the groom. ‘Guess I'm not ashamed of my name.’

‘You ought to be ashamed of your conduct,’ exclaimed the old lady, who up to now had been too angry to speak.

‘Guess English ways bother me some,’ said Peggy, with a puzzled air. ‘You seem angry at my riding your pony round. I've not hurt him. Your hired man, there in his glad-rags, can look him over.’

The smart groom drew himself up and became purple.

‘You are a foreigner then,’ said the old lady somewhat mollified, ‘so perhaps you are only guilty of ignorance.’

‘I am Canadian born,’ answered Peggy proudly, ‘and I only got to England the day

before yesterday. When I saw the pony, I just couldn't help getting on his back. I live in the saddle, nearly—way back in Saskatchewan—I love horses. I am sorry. I ought to have asked your leave to ride the pony: but I didn't know he was yours, or whose he was. Way back in Canada no one would mind.'

The old lady's temper had now vanished. She patted Peggy's shoulder, and told her that if she were making a stay she should ride the pony now and then. 'But not in that dress, you know,' the old lady added sharply; 'you must ride in a habit properly, like other girls.'

'Oh, how good of you!' cried Peggy. 'Guess I'll get a habit! He's a dear pony, and can go some. Guess you're real nice!'

Now it was a very new thing indeed to old Mrs. Higginbotham to be called 'nice.' She was generally considered to be a very cross and cantankerous old lady, and she had quarrelled with many of her neighbours. She was distinctly pleased, and asked Peggy to come into the long white house at the end of the paddock that was hers, and have some iced lemonade.

Peggy's face fell. Iced lemonade sounded

what she would have called 'the clear thing'—but there was Fanny.

'Guess I'd love it,' Peggy said, 'and it's real kind; but my Cousin Fanny is in there (pointing) having her music lesson, and she might come out while I'm gone.'

'You go and fetch the lemonade, Yates,' Mrs. Higginbotham ordered, 'and bring a slice of plum cake too.'

Yates marched off on his errand. He was still offended at being called a 'hired man,' and at the term 'glad-rags.'

'Who is your cousin?' inquired the old lady of Peggy when Yates had departed.

'Fanny Ratten,' Peggy answered promptly, 'and I am Peggy Ratten. Uncle William—Fanny's father, you know—and my father are brothers.'

Mrs. Higginbotham looked suddenly blank. She and the Rattens were not on speaking terms since a certain foolish quarrel. But she stuck to her guns.

'We don't visit—the Rattens and I,' she said, 'but come and use my pony all the same if they do not object. What a fine collar that dog has!'

'He had it given him for saving a child's life,' said Peggy proudly. 'I brought him from Canada with me. Come here, Bounce!'

Bounce came and presented his injured leg for inspection.

'Oh, you poor dear dog!' exclaimed the old lady. 'Why, you've lost your foot!'

'Wolves,' said Peggy, and told the tale.

Then the iced lemonade came, and two slices of rich cake, of which Bounce got a share.

'I'm real sorry you don't visit my uncle and aunt,' remarked Peggy, drinking the last drop of her lemonade.

Mrs. Higginbotham sniffed and said nothing.

'There is Fanny, and I must run!' cried Peggy, kissing the old lady warmly, and thanking her.

'Well, well!' muttered Mrs. Higginbotham as she watched the departing girl, 'there is at least one fascinating Ratten!'

CHAPTER XIV

A LESSON IN DEPORTMENT

'Wos'r Millicent be just mad!' Fanny Ratten threw at her cousin when she heard of Peggy's adventure. 'Mrs. Higginbotham is a disagreeable old cat! She told Millicent that her way of dressing was not even modest. Imagine that! and at a bazaar too! Every one shows a bit of neck now, and Millicent always does dress beautifully, whether she has other faults or not. Mrs. Higginbotham spoke to mother about it too, and got mother's back up! No one likes Mrs. Higginbotham. I do believe she has made up to you just to annoy us!'

'I don't believe that!' cried Peggy stoutly. 'She didn't know who I was, and she was real cross at first.'

'Well, anyway, I know you won't be allowed to use her pony,' retorted Fanny: 'and—oh, yes! she told the vicar that I ate chocolates in church, and father stopped my

pocket-money for a week because of it! Oh, well, I shan't give you away, and I advise you to say nothing about the affair!

Peggy looked at her cousin in dismay.

'Guess I'm not decentful, anyway,' she declared. 'I shall tell uncle and auntie just what happened, and take what's coming to me.'

'Well, you are a silly!' pronounced Fanny; 'any one would think you liked rows!'

'I'm not out to look for trouble,' said Peggy, a little sharply; 'but Jo and I are not used to hiding things: it's not our plan way back home.'

'Have it your own way then!' snapped Fanny. 'I expect you will learn—when you've had a little of Millicent! I know I've had a hateful music lesson! Miss Mason said my fingering would be a disgrace to a girl of five! She made me write out a hundred times, "Bad fingering makes easy passages difficult, and difficult ones impossible"—at least she told me to write it at home and bring it next time. I know what I shall do! I shall go down to our shop and tell one of the girls to type it!' Fanny was so delighted at this (to her mind) extremely clever way out, that her good-humour was quite restored.

Presently she drew Peggy suddenly into

the shelter of a little alley-way. 'Hush!' she whispered.

Then Peggy saw Millicent and Pamela go by, talking in low tones.

'We don't want to walk home with them,' Fanny explained. 'Oh, you can't think what a sneaky, soft-soapy girl Pamela is! She gets me into lots of trouble.'

'Who is she?' asked Peggy.

'Oh—Pamela Bennun-Bright, Milly's greatest friend. She flatters Milly horridly, and gets no end of things out of her. Pamela is a greedy pig! so there! Her father is awfully rich, and Pamela has a big allowance, yet she is always begging. at least not begging exactly, but she hints and works it somehow. Millicent thinks herself very clever, but Pamela is far cleverer. She can turn Millicent round her finger! She always treats me like a little girl, though she is only two years older than I am. She does make me mad! She tells me to "run away and play" if I sit down near her and Milly when they are confabbing. I believe that thick plait round her "bun" is a bought one; and I mean to find out. I'll put Archie on to it—you'll see Archie this afternoon. He is a nice boy, and will soon be going to Dulwich College. He is twelve, and has a private tutor—Mr.

Fitzgerald. He's coming too. He plays tennis really well.'

'I wish I could!' said Peggy. 'I know I'd like it!'

'You'd best practise with me, and not try before strangers,' advised Fanny. 'You and I and Archie Leith had best amuse ourselves together this afternoon. Millicent won't have us bothering round her set, and mother will be surrounded with a lot of old frumps. There will be heaps of good things for tea in the tent, though, and ice and lemonade to be sneaked any time! It won't be so bad' Dad won't be there. He always keeps out of the way on "At Home" days. He says he doesn't like "kick-ups" and "lap-tea." I say, Peggy, what is Bounce after?'

Bounce was running at an amazing rate on his three legs. He was over in the playing-fields of Dulwich College.

'I guess he's seen a jack rabbit or something,' answered Peggy unconcernedly. 'We needn't bother. He'll find his way home all right. He is prairie-bred, and clever. Besides, we are quite near home. Oh, look! There is a team, and the van has Uncle William's name on it!'

'I know what that means,' Fanny declared. 'A lot of gowns and things are coming up for

you to try on, and choose from. I shall take good care to be there, for I may get something new for myself too. I'm sick of the dresses Millicent chooses for me. She is only three years older than I am, and I don't think it fair for her to boss the show the way she does. Oh! wouldn't she be cross if she heard me say "boss the show"? She wanted mother to stop Archie Leith coming here, because she says I pick up his slang. But dad put his foot down about that. He does put his foot down *sometimes*.'

'I figure that my talk won't suit Millicent either,' said Peggy a little uncomfortably.

'You may take your certain about that!' rejoined Fanny, with brutal frankness. 'She squirms under mother's.'

Peggy walked on silently for a space. She was thinking of the freedom of the prairie, where no one was objectionably critical, and a little wave of homesickness swept over her. She remembered with a stifled sigh that five thousand miles lay between her and the peaceful prairie farm. She would write them a long letter each, to-day, but she would not say anything that might worry them. She would tell only the nice things. Poor Peggy! she had already more than a presentiment that this visit was not going to

be a success. She loved Uncle William, and she liked Fanny. Her Aunt Martha she liked—in a way, she told herself; but Millicent she definitely disliked.

This dislike was deepened after luncheon, when Millicent called her into a small and highly decorative apartment which she called her boudoir, and gave her Canadian cousin a few not happily worded admonitions.

'Now, Peggy dear,' she began, in a voice that always sounded artificial, 'you will meet a lot of people this afternoon, of a class you are not accustomed to meet. I advise you to talk very little. You see you have a very curious and not quite pleasant vocabulary, which, well—it would not be considered well-bred. The less you say the better. It would have been better in my opinion if you had not been introduced to people till you had learnt things: but father is obstinate on the point. If you don't talk, and if you keep your hands out of sight, you may pass muster. You are a nice-looking girl, Peggy, and your hair is lovely.'

Peggy did not accept this 'sop' well; the other remarks rankled. Clearly her cousin Millicent was ashamed of her. It was worse than she had feared.

'Say, Millicent!' she began, but Millicent

interrupted her. 'Don't begin your sentences with "Say," Peggy dear.'

'Gee!' cried Peggy with a little gesture of impatience. 'What the——'

'And my dear!—for heaven's sake don't say "Gee!"'

'Guess I ——' once more began Peggy, to be stopped as before.

'And don't say "Guess." Now, dear, don't be cross! I only want to help you. You are come to England to find out things, you know.'

'I guess I have found out one thing already,' Peggy said defiantly. Her cheeks were flaming, and her grey eyes were shining, and had dangerous sparks in them.

Millicent did not ask Peggy what she had found out. The smouldering fires in those big grey eyes conveyed a warning. She hastily dismissed her young cousin with an injunction to go to her room, where a frock was to be chosen for the afternoon.

'Mother is there looking over the things. Go to her, dear; and be a good girl, and don't show temper when people are kind enough to teach you things.'

Peggy fled. A lump was rising in her throat. She wanted to cry 'in the worst way.'

She did cry a little, when her aunt put motherly arms round her and gave her a real motherly kiss. Apparently Mrs. Ratten read the girl's face, and drew conclusions very near the truth. 'Don't you take it to 'cart, Peggy, what Milly may say. She gives it me too, often. Me and your uncle aren't up to Milly's mark. We was brought up different, and I'm too old to learn, as I tell Milly; but you're young, Peggy, and you had best try to pick up the ways of fine folks now you've got the chance. And don't blame Milly, she's been brought up different, and she is a good girl and generous-'arted. Why, she'd give the bread out of her mouth to any one that was 'ungry. She can't 'elp being shamed like, w'en we don't talk right! Come and look at all these nice things on the bed. You are to have your pick: and Peggy, you're as welcome as the buds in May, and don't you go to forget that! and this house is ours—your uncle's and mine, and not Milly's—yes, it's our house! and sometimes I think we've bitten off more than we can chew, if you understand. I like a fine house and fine clothes, I'll own to it, but there's always the fly in the pot of ointment.'

Mrs. Ratten sighed. If Peggy had an

ordeal to face in the afternoon—so had she.

Fanny came in at this point, bent on adding something to her own wardrobe out of those big boxes that had come from the shop.

CHAPTER XV

THE WHITE RAT EPISODE

PEGGY, dressed in a white muslin (real Indian embroidery), with a white hat cockaded by a wonderful osprey, got through her various introductions without any very pronounced blunder, and then made her escape to the Temple summer-house where Fanny and Archie Leith were awaiting her. They were eating ices, and had one on the marble table ready for Peggy.

'Awful lot of blighters here,' remarked Archie, after finishing the last spoonful. 'Look at old Fitzgerald smirking away and twiddling his racket! Those girls think he is sweet as sugar! They ought to have seen him when he looked at my Latin exercise this morning! Thunder-clouds weren't in it! He wouldn't have brought me this afternoon, only mother said he'd got to. Mother couldn't come. "One of the Governor's bad days."'

Peggy eyed the boy with considerable favour. He looked very nice, she thought, in his white tennis flannels, but he had rather a big mouth, and his hair was fiery red. He was freckled too, like Fanny. He fixed a pair of mischievous eyes on Peggy, and added, 'You perhaps don't know what an old retired Colonel's bad day's like? Well, don't you want to? Take that from me!'

'Colonel Leith suffers from gout,' Fanny explained.

'And temper,' put in the Colonel's hopeful son.

'What's that moving in your pocket, Archie?' demanded Fanny.

'Get more ices and I'll show you,' Archie bargained.

'Show me first,' Fanny insisted.

Then Peggy exclaimed, 'Why it's an ermine! I just saw its head.'

'It isn't, then,' retorted Archie. 'It's Peter, and Peter is going to liven up things before the afternoon is out.'

Fanny chuckled.

'I'm going to get some of my own back,' Archie told them. 'I've not forgotten the way old Fitz went for me over my Latin exercise! You wait till he's surrounded by girls, and handing tencups about in the tent!'

He gaped the mysterious pocket open, and out crawled a huge white rat, which he caressed affectionately, to Peggy's delight. She was fond of animals, as we know.

'Archie, you've not cleaned your finger nails!' exclaimed Fanny severely, as she fixed accusing eyes on the hand that caressed the rat.

'Lend me a pin, then,' Archie retorted unabashed. 'I had a bath before I put on my flannels. The bath ought to have cleaned my nails. I say, Peggy, have you seen any real Red Indians where you come from?'

'Sure!' answered Peggy. 'They are always about in the town. They get things at the stores like we do.'

'Then they are tame!' commented Archie disappointedly. 'I don't think tame Indians a bit amusing. But I'd like to hear all about them. Look at old Fitz "serving"! Doesn't he fancy himself as a tennis-player! You wait a bit, you girls! you'll see that smirk disappear at tent-tea-time.' Archie put Peter back into his pocket, remarking, 'What about those ices, Fan?'

Fanny brought back not only ices, but a plate of fancy cakes. Archie, though two years her junior, and a boy, was Fanny's chief friend. Peggy, on this afternoon, won

Archie's palshup too, by reason of the pony episode of the morning, which Fanny described as if she had been an eyewitness, though, as we know, she was enduring a hated music lesson at the time of Peggy's bareback ride, of which as yet Uncle William and Aunt Martha knew nothing, for Peggy had not found what she considered a suitable moment to make her confession.

Archie made up his mind to try a bareback ride himself on Mrs. Higginbotham's pony. If a girl could do it, he certainly could, he argued; but he kept his resolution to himself. He led Peggy on to tell of her prairie experiences; and Peggy, nothing loth, chattered eagerly. Very soon Archie and Fanny knew all about Jo, and Jake, and the wolves, and the wonderful journey. Above all, there was a very detailed account of Bounce's heroism at Quebec, which made the boy anxious to make the dog's acquaintance at once.

But Bounce had not come home yet.

'What if he is lost?' Archie said, watching Peggy's face to see the effect of his words.

'Bounce lost!' laughed Peggy; 'sure he could never be lost! He could find his way from Alberta to Saskatchewan.'

'What a crackjaw name,' commented Archie.

So the hot afternoon sped on, and the trio in the Temple were so happy together that they were quite surprised when the tennis-players began to troop to the tent, where tea was to be had.

'Now for it!' whispered Archie. 'You two keep close to me, and look out for squeals!'

The boy led the way to the big tent, closely followed by the two girls, whose eyes were shining with expectancy. Mrs. Ratten was seated at the far end of the tent, surrounded by 'frumps,' as Fanny termed them. The young folks were crowding in, and the high and mighty servants were behind a long table pouring out tea and iced claret-cup. Archie's tutor was (as he had been certain beforehand would be the case) surrounded by a bevy of fair girls. He was handing a cup to Pamela Bennin-Bright as Archie came up behind him. Peggy and Fanny close in the rear saw the boy slip Peter into Mr Fitzgerald's pocket. It was a blazer he wore, and it was ornamented by a gorgeous badge that meant something or other to do with his College at Oxford, Fanny told Peggy.

All at once there was a shrill scream,

followed by other shrill screams. There was a descent of teacups to the lawn, and rivulets of tea meandered down the fronts of pretty garden-party frocks. Then followed a general exodus from the tent.

'Don't come near us, Mr. Fitzgerald,' cried Pamela Bennun-Bright. 'Catch the creature! He's at the back of your neck now!'

'Where can it have come from?' murmured Millicent into her handkerchief. She did not want the guests to see the smile that was on her lips, and was fearing that a laugh would come in spite of her. For Mr Oscar Fitzgerald was making dabs at the rat with his straw hat, and the rat apparently rather enjoyed it, for he got on to the brim and began to nibble it. The tutor, who had a rooted objection to rats, flung the hat down on the lawn, and Bounce, who came on the scene at that moment, gave chase to the rat. The rat ran for refuge up Mr. Fitzgerald's trouser leg. Archie, fearing for his pet, now came to the rescue, captured Peter, and pocketed him.

'You shall have fifty lines for this, sir!' pronounced the infuriated tutor to Archie.

Archie whispered to Fanny that the fun was worth the price. But Peter had spoiled the garden party. Pamela Bennun-Bright was furious about the tea spilled upon her gown;

and when this young lady was furious she sulked or snapped. She did both in turns this time. She would not answer Millicent's words of sympathy at all at first; and when at last she did speak it was to tell her dear friend that she should not come to any more Ratten At Homes, whereupon Archie, who overheard this, burst into uncontrollable laughter, declaring that he didn't think Miss Bennin-Bright could have made such a fine pun. 'This *has* been a Ratten At Home—with Peter's help!' he told her, which made her simply speechless with anger—as if she would stoop to pun!

'You are the only people I know who allow their guests to be annoyed and insulted by rude boys, Millicent,' she broke out indignantly when at last she could speak.

This brought Millicent to the verge of tears. 'You ought to be well whipped and put to bed—you horrid boy!' she told Archie with venom.

'What have I done?' inquired the boy with an innocent stare.

'You brought that abominable rat here, didn't you?' said Millicent. 'Take it home at once! You shan't have a single ice, you naughty, bad boy!'

'Come along and have some tea,' begged Mr. Fitzgerald, who had arrived on the scene

of battle. He was trying to look at his ease, but was secretly longing to get home and 'have it out' with his young pupil. He was conscious of having made an exhibition of himself over the rat, and his vanity was wounded.

As every one else seemed to be going back to the tent, Millicent and Pamela went there too, with the tutor in attendance.

Peggy, Fanny, and Archie ran back to the shelter of their Temple, where they found Bounce finishing the cake they had left, prior to a visit to the tent, where experience taught him his pawless leg would win him lots of daunties.

'Say, Archie!' began Peggy. 'Will you be punished much?'

'Most likely I'll be locked in the school-room upstairs all day to-morrow,' he replied indifferently, 'but I don't care, I've had a run for my money; and there is plenty I can do. Jacko—that's our monkey—will run up the pear-tree and come in at the school-room window, and keep me company; and I've got my catapult up there, and a pea-shooter. Oh, I'll be all right! I'll let the fishing-basket down, Fanny, if I see you coming—must you do come!'

'I'll come, never fear,' answered Fanny,

'and bring Peggy. Oh, there will be plenty of nice cakes and things when you draw up your fishing-basket!'

Then Peggy had to be told all about the fishing-basket arrangement.

When Archie was incarcerated, his diet was limited to bread and water by the Colonel, and Fanny always came to the rescue with dainties filched from Buckingham House. The schoolroom window overlooked the back garden. And there was a convenient gate in the garden-fence through which Fanny brought her offerings, which were drawn up to the window by her imprisoned comrade.

CHAPTER XVI

MORE TROUBLE

PEGGY very wisely chose to make her confession regarding Mrs. Higginbotham's pony to Uncle William.

It was Uncle William's habit, Peggy discovered, to go for a walk as far as the Crystal Palace every morning, before breakfast, during the fine weather; so she rose early on the morning after the eventful 'At Home' and ran to her uncle as he was striding across the desert of gravel in front of his mansion.

'May I come with you?' Peggy asked breathlessly.

'Of course you may! Glad to have you, Peggy,' he told her heartily. 'How did you get on at the kick-up yesterday? I hear young Archie got into trouble.'

'I got on very well, thank you, uncle,' Peggy answered. 'You see I stayed away

from all the grand people, because—I liked being with Fanny and Archie.’

‘Any other reason?’ demanded her uncle, with a knowing twinkle in his eye.

‘Well I figured it was best,’ Peggy replied. ‘You see Millicent told me not to talk much—and a lot of things, and ——’

Uncle William tucked Peggy’s brown hand under his arm, and gave it a friendly squeeze. ‘Don’t you let Millicent spoil your fun,’ he said. ‘We are just plain folks, Peggy, if we do live in a fine house; and those people who don’t like it can lump it, see? One day, maybe, Milly will learn that God Almighty put us in the world for something better than showing off. Your Canadian free ways will not suit Milly, I dare say, and she will try hard to lick you into shape: and her tongue, when she does the licking, will be about as rough as a cow’s, and I expect you know what that is like!’

Peggy laughed.

They were now in the open road, and Peggy gave a shrill whistle that brought Bounce bounding from his hay pile to join them.

‘Uncle, I did something dreadful yesterday,’ began Peggy. ‘I didn’t know it was dreadful at the time, but Fanny says that

Aunt Martha and Millicent will be ever so angry. I thought I'd tell you first.'

Then she gave a full and truthful account of the pony incident, ending up by saying that she liked Mrs. Higginbotham, and would be sorry if she couldn't go on knowing her.

To Peggy's relief, Uncle William chuckled at the story. 'You can go and see Mrs. Higginbotham when you like,' he said; 'I won't have restrictions put on you. She is rather a quarrelsome old lady, Peggy, and, maybe, it will do her good to have a bright young girl around. But as to the pony, there is no need to ride it, and I would rather you did not, as if anything happened to it, Mrs. Higginbotham would then have a real grievance. I tell you what I will do: I'll take you down to our shop and have you measured for a habit, and then we will go round to the livery stables, and you shall choose a horse you will like to ride, and I will give orders that it is to be always kept for your use. It is better than buying a horse, because that would mean a lot of other details, such as getting a groom, and all that. We will see about it this very morning after breakfast. You will motor down to Peckham with me. Don't say a word about the horse or the habit. It is to

be our secret, and we will give them all a surprise in a few days.'

Peggy's joy knew no bounds. What would Jo say when she put all this into her letter? She forgot the discomfort of Millicent's disapproval, and her home-sickness (which was still there) became less. To have a horse to ride would be such a comfort!

She told her uncle all about her broncho Ned, and how sad she had felt about leaving him.

When Millicent saw Peggy dressed for the motor, she chose to be much annoyed. She spoke to her mother on the subject in a fashion that showed that she was jealous.

'Just what I expected!' she began snappily; 'father is going to pet and spoil Peggy, and put her before his own daughters. Her commences is the attraction, I suppose! And Peggy is making up to him: he holds the purse, of course! Artful little manx! She actually got up early to go for a walk with him!'

'Don't be 'ard on Peggy, Millicent,' ventured the mother; 'she is a nice child, and she can't 'elp not being as ladylike as you.'

'What is the use of my being ladylike, as you style it, when I have relations that—

but never mind ! It is no use talking. One has to bear things, I suppose. But I really don't see why we should always have that hateful boy of Colonel Leith's about the premises. Fanny learns her slang from him.'

' You know that Colonel Leith is a great sufferer,' Mrs. Ratten reminded her. ' You know 'e is quite poor too. Archie would get a miserable time of it if it weren't for this 'ouse.'

Millicent frowned. She was not then thinking of Archie, however, but of her mother's deplorable absence of 'aitches.' She hesitated to make her mother try to use them, for fear she should put them on to words to which they did not belong, which would be ten times worse than merely dropping them. There were times when the proud Millicent felt that her cross was heavier than she could bear. Nature had, she told herself, intended her for a great lady, and—there was the irony of parentage ! Her mother certainly did try to live up to the position money had given her, and if she failed it could scarcely be accounted a crime. But her father never made the least pretence of being anything but what he was—a draper, who had got on. He walked about and took his meals in shirt-sleeves in hot weather. He talked about

the 'shop' unashamedly before their greatest guests. If he were proud of anything it was of 'the shop,' which now occupied almost an entire street, and had grown from a drapery store to a big emporium where practically anything could be bought, except food. He had an army of employés, and a large number of horses, which drew his innumerable vans. Millicent would have liked to live where she could not meet these vans with her father's name blazoned upon them. She was of opinion that her father owed it to his children to retire from the business and go to live somewhere where the origin of their wealth was not known. But there! even if they went ever so far away her father would still talk about 'the shop!'

Millicent turned away from her mother, who had a pile of red tradesmen's books on an ornate secrétaire in front of her. It was her day for checking the accounts. Mrs. Ratten looked at the elegant retreating figure of her elder daughter a little wistfully. She was very proud of Millicent, who was, as she was wont to say, 'such a perfect lady', but it did occur to her sometimes that Milly might 'lend her a hand' at the housekeeping. There were so many things to see to in a

big house with a lot of servants! The whole of Millicent's time was frittered away in frivolities. She had no taste for fancy work, and as for useful sewing, she would not deign to acknowledge its existence. She read novels when there was no other entertainment to be had. She had her own 'car,' and could drive it herself with considerable skill, but there was nothing else over which she had taken any trouble, except the study of dress and society manners. She was dissatisfied and discontented with life and its prospects. She loathed trade with a bitter loathing.

When people are discontented and ungrateful, and blame Fate, it generally happens that those around them have a bad time. The servants at Buckingham House were wont to remark to each other that nothing but the high wages, and good table, and liberality as to 'days off,' would have rendered them willing to remain in the same house with 'Miss Millicent,' who was always looking round for 'something to grumble at.'

To Peggy the servants took a genuine liking at once. She was not 'stuck-up.' She never 'left her things lying about all over the place.' She had always a pleasant

smile and a civil word for them. Dane, the housemaid, reported in the kitchen that 'Miss Margaret' had said to her regarding the laying out of her clothes ready for her to dress: 'Sure, I can do all that for myself, Dane. I don't want to give you extra trouble. Guess I've never been waited on. Way back home I work like you do. Mother and I do all the housework—washing, ironing, baking; make butter and all.'

If on this morning Millicent were looking out for something to grumble at, she found it.

She was walking on the terrace outside the open drawing-room windows when she was struck by the 'abominable' playing of scales that was going on.

Fanny was practising.

All the sharps and flats were being disregarded as Fanny's fingers travelled along the keys.

Millicent crept in softly behind the pianist, and saw a book about American Indians perched up on the music stand. Fanny was reading this book as her fingers went on making discord. She was roused by a stinging box on the ear, and jumped from the music-stool furious with rage.

'I'll pay you out for that, Milly, see if I don't!' ejaculated Fanny.

'You are a naughty, lazy girl!' her sister told her, 'and you richly deserve what you got! Give me that book at once!'

Fanny did give Millicent the book! She flung it right in her face!

Millicent left the room at once, and went to her mother to explain to her what her duty was regarding her younger daughter.

In the meantime a farmer had driven up in a gig. He was a very red-faced farmer, and his eyes were of a fiery description. He jumped down from the gig, flung the reins over the horse's back, and advanced up the curved marble steps which led to the front door. Then he rang a furious peal, which brought the boy in buttons racing to the door. The farmer gave his name as 'Dinky,' and demanded to see Mr. or Mrs. Ratten at once.

CHAPTER XVII

DINKY'S ARRAIGNMENT

It seemed that Bounce had, the day before, worried a sheep of Farmer Dinky's. It was a 'Southdown wether,' and had won the first prize and the 'Cooper Cup' at Birmingham. Farmer Dinky had, he said, only just discovered where the dog came from. Millicent, who was crossing the hall on her way from that brief and caustic interview with her mother, overheard what The farmer was saying, and the generous side of her nature sprang uppermost. She had visions of Peggy's heart-broken grief should Farmer Dinky take the law into his own hands, and waylay and shoot the dog. He had been known to do this on more than one occasion, just as he had thrashed boys who were helping themselves to the apples. Millicent meant to save Bounce. She came forward at once, and asked Farmer Dinky into her own boudoir, and rang for old ale to be brought,

which she had heard was the farmer's pet weakness. She filled a foaming silver tankard with her own fair hands and gave it to him, remarking that it was dreadfully hot and thirsty weather, and that when he was refreshed he could tell her all about the trouble, and they could see what could be done to set things right from a financial point of view.

Farmer Dinky was considerably mollified, and conceded that really it was a case of prevention rather than cure. The 'wether,' he said with a chuckle, was a match for most dogs, and could hold his own. Also, the dog had been beaten off by one of the farm hands. No actual harm had been done. But a dog that worried sheep ought not to have a free run.

Millicent agreed with this, and told the farmer that the dog had been used to a prairie life, and to hunting wolves; that he was just brought over on a visit with a young Canadian cousin, who had refused to be separated from her favourite, and as yet they had not had time to find out his ways.

'You've found out one of them, Miss Ratten!' laughed the farmer, who was now quite good-humoured.

'The funny thing is that there are no sheep where that dog comes from,' said Millicent.

'The dog has developed a new vice here, it seems! He must be taken out on a chain in future, and be chained up here, when no one is in charge of him.'

'That settles the business then, Miss Ratten,' retorted the farmer. 'There is no more to be said.'

But there was, for just then the culprit himself entered the room by the open French window, and promptly presented the injured leg for the farmer's inspection, while he wagged his bushy tail in the most friendly fashion.

'Well, I'm darned! -I beg your pardon, Miss Ratten' 'the farmer exclaimed. 'Here he is, trying to make friends with me as had it in my heart to shoot him! He's lost a paw too, poor fellow, rat-trap, I suppose?'

'No, a wolf did it,' explained Millicent.

'A wolf, eh! Well, the dog's a good plucked one anyway. What breed is he? Looks like a collic, but he's not all collic—Canadian kind of collic, maybe,' the farmer said as he patted Bounce.

'I am quite unable to tell you what breed the dog is,' Millicent declared. 'Father says he's a bit of everything; but he won that silver collar for saving a child's life at Quebec.'

Farmer Dinky examined the collar, and read the inscription, then patted the dog again. 'I wouldn't mind owning that dog,' he said meditatively. 'He's got a brain-piece that dog has, and good eyes. Some collies have wicked eyes, and you can't trust them further than you can see them—and some retrievers too! There's a bit of retriever in this Canadian chap, to my thinking. But mischief is his worst fault, and maybe being used to hunting wolves was the cause of his worrying my wether. He's young enough to be taught too. Why, Miss Ratten, dogs have got their characters same as human beings. Some are bad, mean, and treacherous, but a dog that is good beats humans hollow in goodness, that's what I think. This dog is a good dog.'

Bounce's eyes were fixed attentively upon the red face of the farmer while he delivered himself of this speech, and when he had finished Bounce crept up closer to him, and licked his hand. 'Look at that now!' cried the farmer; 'that's the hand that would have pulled the trigger if I sighted him when my monkey was up! I believe he has understood every word I have said!'

'He's a Nero,' came in a voice from the door. It had opened to reveal Mrs. Ratten.

From her remark, she had heard the last part of the conversation. The farmer rose and took up his hat, which had been lying on the floor beside him. 'How do you do, ma'am?' he said politely.

'Very well, thank you,' replied Mrs. Ratten, 'and I 'ope you're the same. I'm afraid Bounce has been up to mischief.'

'That's so,' answered the farmer, 'mischievous it is, and no worse. I wouldn't mind having that dog, as I've been telling the young lady here. Now I must be going, for all my hay's down, and the weather so fine and hot, it would be tempting providence not to get it in quick.'

When the farmer was gone, Millicent went to look for her sister, to seek a reconciliation. Despite the fact that she had rated her mother soundly on the undisciplined condition of Fanny, her conscience pricked her for that box on the ear she had administered. She also made allowances for Fanny's outburst of temper on the occasion. She was not aware of it, but her action in trying to save Peggy trouble about the dog had put her—momentarily, at any rate—on a higher level. Perhaps nothing raises the character so quickly as doing a kind action. To do something kind and unselfish seems to set all sorts of good impulses in motion.

She found Fanny in the act of putting cakes into a basket destined for the young scapegrace who would be confined to that upstairs schoolroom by order of the Colonel, who called it 'giving him cells.'

Fanny looked up sharply as her sister appeared. She was kneeling in front of an open sideboard door. She evidently expected a scolding for her present occupation, and was prepared to resent it actively. Great was her astonishment when Millicent said quite gently, 'I ought not to have boxed you, Fan, though you were doing very wrong to be reading while you practised. I am sorry I struck you!'

Fanny jumped up, and flung her arms round her sister, exclaiming, 'I was a pig to throw the book at you anyway, Milly!'

So they kissed and were friends, 'until the next time,' as Fanny told Peggy afterwards, 'because, you know, Milly and I are bound to quarrel!'

Peggy came in from her first motor-ride in high spirits. She had had a glorious morning with Uncle William. And there was their great secret! They had been round to Tilting's, and Peggy had chosen a spirited grey mare, which was to be kept for her sole use while she was in England. The riding-

habit was to be made quickly. Peggy was to go with Uncle William next day to be 'tried on.' She had been vastly amused when she found she would have to sit on a wooden horse as part of the process. But at the livery stables she had greatly entertained the grooms by her practical knowledge of horses, and her funny way of conveying it. She had been warned that the mare she had chosen was a kicker.

'Guess I'll cure her, then,' said Peggy with confidence. 'I'll take her on the "ploughing," and put her into a gallop, and let her have her kick out! Guess she'll find the game isn't worth the candle.'

'But,' put in Uncle William anxiously, 'I would much rather you chose a quiet beast.'

'I could amble!' said Peggy. 'I figure there is not a horse here that I'd think was not quiet after our bronchos! I'd ride any horse you have here bareback and lead a couple more at the same time! Geo! you don't know the first thing about horses in this country!'

The grooms, though not flattered, were unfeignedly entertained. Truly it was as good as a play to see that girl of fourteen, with her great pigtails hanging below her waist, examining those horses, and giving

her expert opinions: opinions that had to be respected too. She peeped into the mangers with a critical eye. In one she pointed out some partially masticated food. 'That wants looking to,' she remarked to the nearest groom. 'Guess there is work for the vet.' She detected one horse standing with one toe of the fore-leg pointed, and demanded to know if that foot were being seen to, as it was plain to her that something was wrong with the inside wall of the hoof. She discovered the wind-sucking habit in another horse. She also picked out a number of very fine equine specimens unerringly. The grooms decided in their own minds that they would be sorry to have that 'kid' for 'boss.' 'She knew a jolly sight too much!'

On reaching home Peggy went in search of Fanny, whom she found at length seated on the branch of an apple-tree reading. Fanny refused to talk. She kept her eyes steadily on her book, and grunted disapproval at the interruption. Peggy thought she was offended, and went away grieved.

Really Fanny was nothing of the sort. The secret of her singular behaviour was simply this. She wanted dreadfully to tell Peggy of the battle royal between herself and Millicent; and she decided that it would

be very mean to do so after Millicent had come and made it all up so generously. Fanny, knowing herself to be weak in the matter of keeping this kind of secret, adopted the method of silence till her resolution should have time to take firm root.

But after luncheon she whispered to Peggy that Millicent was going to London with her mother in her special car that afternoon, so they could go and find out how Archie was faring, and take him supplies.

CHAPTER XVIII

SUCCOUR FOR THE PRISONER

COLONEL LEITH, who had some trouble to make ends meet on his half-pay, lived not in Dulwich village, but in East Dulwich, where it was cheaper. He had settled in this place that Archie might have the advantage of the famous College so soon as the young tutor had prepared him.

The house was one of a modest row, known as Ashbourne Grove. The houses were semi-detached, and each bore a name. The Colonel's house was called 'Dovedale.' It was a pretty grove, for there was an avenue of young chestnuts, and every front garden had laburnum, hlae, and red hawthorn, planted in it by the enterprising owner of the property. The small back gardens were left to the tenants to lay out according to individual fancy. Colonel Leith's back garden, which had once possessed a lawn and flower-beds, had been reduced to a desert by Archie

and certain boy-friends, who played cricket (and havoc) there. In what had once been a tool-house, a number of rabbits now lived (when they were not loose in the garden!), and a bicycle-shed was the nominal home of a monkey. We say nominal advisedly, for Jacko ran all over the place. Poor Mrs. Leith's time was entirely taken up with her invalid husband, who would scarcely ever allow her to leave his side; and she had a cheap and inadequate general servant who let things slide; consequently, what with Archie, and what with Jacko, the inside of the house was but a degree better than the back garden. The Colonel lived night and day in what should have been the drawing-room, and was the only well-kept spot in the house, because Archie never entered it, except to what he termed a 'Court-martial.' In this room were displayed beautiful silver, and ivories, and crushed turquoise articles, and Benares ware, brought back from India. On the floor were wonderful tiger skins, lying on a Peruvian carpet, also from India. On the walls were water-colour drawings made in India by Mrs. Leith in happier days. There was a baby-grand piano too. The Colonel's sword, highly polished, hung on a wall opposite to his long-chair, in which he

rested by day and slept at night. Near the long-chair was an Indian folding-table with heavily carved legs, and having for a top a big Benares tray. On this table the invalid's pipe, papers, and other necessities reposed. It was a pretty room, and refined. But outside it things were in a state of incredible disorder and disrepair. The stair-carpet and dining-room carpet had been worn by Archie and his friends to a shabbiness that defied renovation. Banister rails were broken, walls were damaged. The condition of the furniture can be left to the imagination of the reader. Poor Mrs. Leth had long since given up the unequal contest of ruling the household. She was weak of body and weak of character. She had had plenty of servants in India, and things had been different. Now she was in a backwater, and her one aim in life seemed to be to convert herself into the slave of a domineering and cross husband, who nevertheless still possessed her adoration.

Archie was neglected. There was no doubt whatever about that. Mrs. Leth would have raised her eyebrows in tired surprise if any one had told her this. Archie was well fed, his clothes were properly seen to; he had a young Oxford man in charge of his education. He was allowed to devastate the garden

with his pets. What more could a boy want ?

There is thus to be said in extenuation of Mrs. Leith's lack of understanding on this point. Archie, being born in India, had to be sent to England when quite small, as is the case with all Anglo-Indian children, so his parents scarcely knew him, until Colonel Leith's health gave way, and he too had to come to England and remain there. Then Archie, a boy of ten, was removed from a boarding-school and became one of the household. He found his mother a stranger, who was too tired to interest herself in anything save her invalid husband. He found his father a peppery, would-be disciplinarian, who for the most part shut himself up in one room. Archie concerned himself very little with either of his parents, except on those occasions when the long-suffering and really well-meaning Mr Fitzgerald reported him to the Colonel. This only occurred when the tutor was driven to desperation by the boy's wilfulness.

Mr. Fitzgerald had just got his degree at Oxford when he answered Colonel Leith's advertisement for a tutor. His people were poor, and the young fellow, who had won scholarships that enabled him to go to the

University, did not in the least know what career to follow when College days were ended. He took this post 'while he looked round,' he said.

The rat incident had made Mr. Fitzgerald look ridiculous in the eyes of every one at the garden party. He was furious and unforgiving: for a wound to the vanity of a young man is the unpardonable sin. He reported Archie, and the Colonel 'gave him cello.' It happened that the tutor was going to town on some private business the day after the 'Peter' incident. Millicent had offered to give him a place in her car, as she was motoring her mother to town. This arrangement fell in admirably with Fanny's plans regarding Archie.

In the afternoon, Fanny, Peggy, and Bounce started off to walk to East Dulwich, carrying with them a bountiful supply of good things for the 'prisoner' Bounce (by Millicent's order) was led by a chain, to his infinite disgust. Peggy was full of sympathy for him, but she saw the justice of the restriction. Had not Bounce's old master told her at Winnipeg that the dog had the vice of worrying 'stock'? Had he not attacked a young bear at Kenora? Had not Jake brought many similar charges against him?

'You brought it on yourself, Bounce,' she told him, in answer to the reproach in his eyes. 'You can't bite through this chain, Bounce, as you did the rope when you were tied up that night of the Highland School dance! You are a long, long way from the prairie now, Bounce!'

Bounce looked into Peggy's eyes, and in his she read a pleading to go back to Canada and freedom. There was an echo in her own heart. She tried to stifle it, but deep down was a terrible home-sickness already. She was always aware of it, even when she laughed and talked of other things. Now, walking with her cousin and Bounce along the Half Moon Lane, under brilliant sunshine, she was really five thousand miles away in thought. She was back in the sod stable with Jo; and he was saying, 'Guess you'll wish yourself back, Peg, before you've been a month with our fine relations!'

Yes, Jo had been right. In two days Peggy was deadly home-sick, in spite of much kindness shown her. The fine house, the servants, the fashionable gowns did not compensate for the loss of that simple prairie home and those dear faces which she could no longer see! Even the horse she was to ride made her pine for her broncho Ned.

True, she sometimes found herself enjoying things; but it was only to go back to that secret longing for home—the home she had been so anxious to leave!

‘What are you dreaming about, Peggy?’ demanded her cousin. ‘I have talked and talked, and you never answer! And here we are at Ashbourne Grove. We shall go to the back. There is a little lane between the back gardens, and a gate that dustmen use. We shall go that way, and Archie will be watching at the window.’

CHAPTER XIX

'SCRAF' WITH A MONKEY

ARCHIE was watching at his schoolroom window. He was, in fact, seated on the window-sill most perilously, his heels resting on a fork of the pear-tree, which was nailed against the wall of the house. On the sill at his side sat a not over-small monkey, who kept showing his teeth in startling flashes as the two girls and the dog came up the weedy garden path. Peggy took the chain off Bounce to his joy then. The boy jumped back into the room at sight of them, and flung out a cord (with a fish basket at the end of it) which was firmly attached to the locked door handle. This was for the dainties that Fanny was providing, but Jacko evidently thought it was intended for his gymnastic uses. He swarmed down it, to within three feet of the ground, when Bounce seized his tail. In one second, Jacko had leaped on to the dog's back, and had begun to drag out hand-

ful of Bounce's tawny hair. The tail had to be liberated to enable Bounce to howl. He did this to such purpose that numberless back windows flew open, and inquiring heads popped out.

Bounce in all his varied experience had never before encountered a monkey. He was terrified, and raced round the little garden on his three legs, the monkey keeping his seat like a jockey. Thus being of no avail, Bounce tried rolling, and in the process managed to get a bite in, which infuriated the monkey. Peggy, whom prairie experience rendered fearless, seized the monkey and tore him away from her favourite, administering a few sharp cuffs to the snarling animal before throwing him over into the next garden. What she did that for was not quite clear. She might just as well have shut him in the shed, where he was supposed to live and didn't. Then began an outcry from over the fence, for the monkey, having been deprived of his rightful antagonist, had attacked a big yellow cat that happened to be sleeping in a clump of ferns on which Jacko had fallen.

Then Matilda, the big raw-boned servant of the Leath establishment, came out, armed with a broom. Bounce came up to her and

presented his maimed leg, looking a thousand appeals from his beautiful eyes.

It so chanced that Matilda liked dogs as much as she detested monkeys. She patted Bounce, and then strode to look over the fence, where a fearful combat appeared to be raging, to judge from the noise. The next-door servant and Matilda then commenced a wordy combat of their own, and Fanny seized the opportunity of filling the fish-basket with good things, which Archie drew up with marvellous quickness. Archie's face was a picture. He had enjoyed the scene as only a schoolboy can.

'You'd best make tracks,' he advised in a low voice. So the girls and the dog were gone by the time Matilda and the next-door servant had finished abusing each other, and the monkey had bounded over the fence and made his way with the aid of the pear-tree to his young master.

It is well to state here that Bounce point-blank refused to make any more excursions to East Dulwich. Jacko had methods of warfare not at all to Bounce's liking. Wolves he understood; bears he knew how to deal with; but this creature who rode him like a horse, and tore his hair out, and bit his ears while riding him, was not of his prairie

world. On the way home, at the end of his chain, he appeared to meditate deeply. Probably he was wishing himself back in Canada, where a dog could understand things, and deal with unpleasant situations with dignity. Peggy noted that he hung his head, and concluded that he was suffering the humiliation of defeat. He had not come off victor this time, and the consciousness galled him. Peggy had rescued him; and—the monkey was alive, and probably uninjured! Even the extra dainties he received at tea-time from Peggy and Fanny did not heal his wounded pride.

After tea, Uncle William took the girls out in his car, and Bounce nursed his troubles in the hay pile.

When the car returned to Buckingham House, in time for dinner, the others were back. Millicent said to Peggy, ‘There is a letter for you from Hastings in a most awful envelope, and an appalling handwriting!’

Peggy flushed crimson as she took the offending epistle. She did not attempt to open it, but held it in clutched fingers. She knew that it was from Mrs. Sweeny. By some instinctive impulse, her other hand crept up to her breast, where she could feel

the little bag containing the dollar bills her father had given her to pay her fare back to Canada should she get suddenly very home-sick. She made her escape to her pretty bedroom, which somehow had lost much of its charm for her now. She sat in a wicker chair near the open window, where the red roses were nodding in a little breeze that had sprung up. But she did not see the roses. What she saw was a little room with lumber walls, and a pointed rafter-roof, and a pointed floor on which lay cowhides. Tears dimmed her bright eyes. That room was so far away ! She suddenly sprang up. She could not read her letter in this room. She must get nearer to that other. The nearest thing here was the hay pile where Bounce would be. Bounce was her one tie here to that far prairie. She ran down the servants' staircase, that she might not encounter any of her relations, and went out into the yard where kind Uncle William had had that load of hay put for her dog. Her uncle somehow understood so much better than any of the others.

Bounce came out of his burrow at the sound of his young mistress's footsteps, and lay beside her as she sat on the hay and opened her letter. It seemed such a dear letter to her, although the writing was bad,

and the spelling worse. Mrs. Sweeny had never been an intimate friend in the prairie, but here in England Peggy's heart flowed out in affection for her. She was a bit of the prairie home. Mrs. Sweeny gave news of Mrs. Pickrell and little Ada among other things, and said they were all coming to Dulwich before they went back to Canada, as Mr. Ratten had invited them.

Peggy was seized with a sudden terror of the reception these friends of hers were likely to receive from her cousin Millicent. But she must see them! She could never bear to let them go back home without seeing them! She began to wonder if she would ever bear to let them go without taking her with them! Millicent's remarks about Mrs. Sweeny's letter had cut her to the quick. 'She sure looks down on us all, Bounce!' Peggy said to her faithful friend. 'Way back home, Bounce, no one looked down on anybody. Guess you and I want the prairie right now!'

The dog rubbed his shaggy head against the girl's hand in sympathy. His beautiful eyes watched the tears that now fell unashamedly. He whined his own trouble. She went on talking to him. 'They'll be just starting out to work again after their

dinner way back home, Bounce; dad, and Jake, and Jo; for there's seven hours difference between the time in Canada and here, Bounce! Oh, Bounce! It isn't the least bit like what I thought it would be, and I couldn't bear being here if I had not you! I wonder when I will get a letter from home!'

Just then Uncle Wilham's cheery voice calling Peggy drove the clouds away.

CHAPTER XX

A PASSAGE OF ARMS

A WEEK later Millicent was with her friend Pamela in her car, when they saw a girl riding towards them on a fine grey mare.

'Why—it's Peggy!' Millicent said, with bitterness evident in her tones. 'The very latest thing in habits—and in riding-hats too! That is father's doing; and all kept secret! Father wants Peggy to outshine me in something. That is why he has done it! Oh, it is hateful the way he spoils Peggy! He puts her before his own daughters.'

'It is a real shame!' said Pamela.

Peggy drew rein as she came up to the car. She looked really beautiful, Pamela mentally decided; but she was not going to tell her friend thus.

Peggy sat her horse with that ease and grace which is inborn in the Canadian. The perfect fit of her habit gave distinction. Peggy's face was pretty, as we know, and now that

her eyes were dancing with pleasure, and her cheeks flushed with the exercise, it looked very pretty indeed. Her splendid braids of hair hung down to the saddle. Pamela, regarding them, was green with envy.

Peggy was too pleased to be on a good horse's back to observe what was in fact so easy to read on the faces of the two girls in the car. She exclaimed in her joyous treble, 'Uncle Wilham and I planned this surprise ! Isn't the mare a beauty ? She has the clearest thing in trots ! I put on my habit at the shop, and Uncle Wilham is having my other clothes sent back in one of the vans. He and I went round to Tilling's, and I mounted there. Won't Aunt Martha and Fanny be surprised when I ride up to the door ! Gee !'

Millicent spoke at last, and all the jealous venom boiled over in her icy words.

'I don't think they will be surprised at all, unless they are more dense than I imagine. It is easy to see how you wheedle everything out of father ! Slyly too ! Getting up early to go for walks with him before breakfast—and—oh, lots of things ! Don't imagine I am blind, Peggy, or other people either, for the matter of that ! Father's favouritism regarding you is common talk. It is not much to be proud of, I think, to come over

here and try to supplant father's own daughters.'

Peggy's eyes dilated in horror. She had not been able to take in all the words of this ill-natured and vulgar attack, but she had grasped enough to arouse the fierce spirit of the free Westerner.

'How dare you accuse me of such things, Millicent?' she flung back at her cousin. 'Sure you know that it is wicked lies you are speaking! It is to Uncle William I'll ask you to repeat what you have said!'

She gave a flick to her mare and was soon galloping away down Half Moon Lane.

Tears of mortification sprang to Millicent's eyes.

'Peggy will tell father,' she half-sobbed, 'and I shall not dare to ask him for that trip to Switzerland with all of you. I had so counted on it too! Father will be dreadfully angry. He has always had such a feeling about his poor Canadian relations. How I wish I had held my tongue! What a fool I was to be sure! Now I shall get no holiday except the silly seaside that mother and father always insist on for themselves and Fanny and me.'

'I advise you to drive home at once and get the first say in,' Pamela, the diplomatist, suggested.

'Father will be at the shop,' Millicent said drearily. 'No doubt Peggy will ride to Peckham and see him. I did speak abominably sharply, I know, and I own that some of the things I said were unjust. Peggy would not consciously wheedle. But father does make a favourite of her, and it is anything but nice for me. I don't think Fanny minds, or even notices. She and Peggy and that disagreeable Archie Leith seem to have struck up a fast friendship. Well, I'd give something to have the last ten minutes to live over again! I would just hide my real feelings, and pay compliments. Also—I may as well say it—I think myself a spiteful, jealous little cat to have spoiled Peggy's pleasure. She really is a warm-hearted, unselfish child—and very lovable. But her commonness gets on my nerves, and father's petting her so arouses my jealousy. I am not fit to hold a candle to Peggy in lots of ways, and that's the truth.'

'You are the most charming and attractive girl I know,' pronounced Pamela, 'and I think you have very good reason to be offended by the favouritism your father shows. Peggy has a very hot temper too, I observe. I am very, very sorry for you, darling.'

Millicent gave an impatient shrug of her shoulders. She was not in the mood to accept her friend's flattery and consolation.

But Peggy had no intention at all of reporting the unpleasant scene. Prairie-bred girls do no 'small' things. But her heart was bursting with distress. Her one longing was for home. But a few miles of hard riding lifted her burthen somewhat. She began to see with new eyes. Perhaps Uncle William did make too much of her. It might be natural that Millicent, who was his own daughter, should feel aggrieved. Then, again, probably Millicent had said a great deal more than she meant. Peggy made up her mind to stop those early walks with Uncle William, and to run after him less, since Millicent did not like it. Farther than this she did not see her way in this regard. But she faced the fact that to run back to Canada after such a short time in England would make Uncle William very grieved. It would put all her English relations in a bad light too. This would be very unfair, as she had really been treated with extreme kindness, and no doubt her prairie ways must be very annoying to a girl like Millicent. But to stay a whole year she felt would be impossible. She could not bear home-sickness so long as that!

Grand houses and grand ways were not so fascinating seen at close quarters as they had been in those filmy dreams away in far Canada! How had Jo known this would be so? She could not tell; but he was right. To Peggy there was nothing of the clean, honest, outspoken simplicity here at Dulwich that she had found to be the common order of things in the prairie. There was so much of what Peggy in her simple ignorance regarded as downright deception. People pretended such a lot. They paid compliments to one another and called each other by endearing terms, when they did not really like each other at all. All this Peggy had observed again and again, and being a child of nature from the far West, disliked it all intensely.

Of course there was no work to do here as at home; but Peggy began to long for work. She grew restless in inaction. She was to take music lessons as her uncle had promised, and she looked forward eagerly to long hours of practising. How gladly she would have taken on herself some duties at Buckingham House; but this was not allowed. She was not even permitted by Millicent to dust her own room, or even mend her stockings. 'What are servants

for ? ' Millicent would ask. It must not be supposed by this that Millicent was not kind to servants. She was kind and generous too. It was vanity, and vanity alone, that caused her to leave all work of every kind to paid domestics.

As Peggy was returning home she drew rein at the gate of Mrs. Higginbotham. They had a few moments' pleasant chat, which raised Peggy's spirits considerably, and Peggy promised to come in next day if she were allowed.

When she reached home, a groom from Tilling's was there on a mount, ready to take back Peggy's mare.

'Have you had any trouble with her, miss ? ' he inquired.

'Not a bit,' replied Peggy. 'She is the clear thing, and she can go some.'

The groom looked in admiration at the way Peggy dismounted unaided. She patted the mare, and gave her sugar.

As the girl watched the mare led away, her head suddenly fell. She remembered that she had now to encounter her Cousin Millicent again. She need not have feared. Millicent was anxious enough now to smooth matters over.

CHAPTER XXI

UNCLE WILLIAM'S SECRET

PEGGY cried a little over her first letters from home. She read them sitting on Bounce's hay pile, the dog lying at her feet. Jo's letter touched her most, for he gave her details of all the work being done, and Peggy kept saying to herself, 'And I am not there!' Jo also enclosed some sorry photographs he had taken. One was of the sod stable. Another was of the wood pile. Another showed a team of four horses, every one of which she knew so well. Yet another showed the 'buggy' standing in the yard, with no horse in the shafts, but a rooster or two making perches of them.

By now Peggy knew better than to produce these photographs for general inspection. Fanny and Archie Leith should see them, and, of course, dear Uncle William.

It was a great comfort to Peggy that she had not after all had to give up those early

walks with Uncle William. Millicent had allowed the generous side of her nature to come uppermost regarding that bitter little encounter in Half Moon Lane. She had pocketed her pride, and apologized to Peggy very prettily the very same night. She relieved Peggy's mind by saying, 'You couldn't wheedle any one, Peggy! I only wish I was half as straight as you! Be with father as much as ever you like. There! Will you forgive me?'

And affectionate Peggy had answered by a hug, that disarranged her cousin's dainty neckwear. Millicent had arrived at being proud of Peggy's riding too. Every one was talking about it, and there was reflected glory! Peggy on horseback was a credit to the family! Uncle William had insisted on an equestrian photograph of Peggy being taken, to send out to Canada, and Millicent had one enlarged, and framed, and hung in the drawing-room, which flattered the girl not a little. But she was most pleased that the photograph would be hung in the dear sitting-room at home. Jo would see what a nice mare she had to ride. He would probably make fun of her fashionable habit and hat, but that did not matter.

As Peggy was coming in from her ride

one morning. Uncle William's car ran up the gravel desert, and he called to her to dismount and to come with him round to the motor-shed.

She saw by the twinkle in his eyes that he had some good news to communicate.

He tucked Peggy's hand under his arm and walked away with her to Bounce's hay pile at the far corner of the yard.

'I've been thinking a lot about what you told me of the poverty of Archie's home,' he said; 'and at last I have fixed things up for the Colonel a bit. He will never know.' I bought that pretty white house, with the red-tiled roof, near the picture-gallery, that you admired so much. I have furnished it well, and I have squared an agent to offer it to Colonel Leith, just as it stands, for a pound less than he is paying at Ashbourne Grove! There is a beautiful garden, as you know, and I have put up a playroom in one corner for your friend Archie. There is a good bath chair on the premises too! I have told the agent to say that the gentleman who bought it and furnished it has decided not to live in it, and wants nice people there. You must not let Fanny or Archie or any one know. All this is our secret, Peggy! Mrs. Leith

came over and saw the place, after the agent had called, and they are going to move in next week. I have also sent fifty pounds in bank notes, registered from London, with a typed line or two made, saying that a friend who wishes to remain anonymous, and has by good fortune amassed wealth, sends these with hearty good wishes. That will do, won't it, Peg? They will never guess, and you and I will keep our secret. Retired soldiers have a poor time of it unless they have money from other sources than a grateful country! Really this sort of thing is all the pleasure I get out of my money. It seems queer, doesn't it, that my money has robbed me of my home? I like simple ways, and I used to enjoy the dinners your aunt cooked. Fine stews she used to make, and her apple dumplings wanted a lot of beating! Now all these la-di-da things they serve up, and make me eat with a fork, they are not to my taste. I tell Millicent I could put one of them *entrée*-things into my hollow tooth, and I wish they'd give me something to eat! That gets Millicent's back up—and there you are, Peggy! You understand, because you and me are in the same boat.'

Peggy did understand. Everything about

her uncle seemed to bend him closer to her heart. She loved him. She knew that he was a very lonely man in that fine house. Some men would have been soured; but Uncle William's kindness towards others grew with his own sense of loneliness and disappointment.

'How I wish you would come out to Canada for a visit, uncle!' Peggy exclaimed. 'You would sure love it! and dad and mother and Jo would be so happy to see you! When I think of how happy you will make the Leuths I do think some one ought to try to make you real happy.'

'You do, little Peg,' he told her, 'and I have half a mind to go for a trip to Canada. But I've never been out of England, and I've never been in a ship, and it's a bit of a facer to a man who is getting on in years. But, maybe—who knows?'

He began to laugh.

'Why are you laughing, uncle?' Peggy asked, wanting to share

'I was thinking that I'd be able to eat peas with my knife out there!' he said.

Just then Bounce appeared, lopping along with a big Cochon-rooster in his mouth. The rooster was yelling as only an outraged rooster can.

'Put it down, Bounce!—you bad, mean dog!' cried Peggy; and Bounce obeyed. The rooster stalked off with much indignant flapping of wings. He was apparently quite uninjured.

'That dog is for everlasting hunting something,' remarked Uncle William. 'He's getting his name up in Dulwich! I thought he was kept on the chain since he worried a sheep!'

'He bites open the catch somehow, or else some one undoes him,' Peggy said, a little ruefully. 'Guess he'd be better way back home. He is not used to ways in the old country.'

'Don't you fret about him, little Peg,' said Uncle William. 'Money'll square people, and I've got plenty. I wanted the dog to come with you, as I thought you'd be lonely and sore at first over here.'

'You are the dearest dear!' Peggy declared.

'That's all right, then!' he answered cheerily; 'and now we must go in, for I can hear the gong, and here you are still in your habit! Bounce had best come in with us for safety!'

CHAPTER XXII

A GREAT SURPRISE

THE Leiths were comfortably settled at Herne Lodge. The change to brighter and better conditions so much improved Colonel Leith's health that he might be seen walking about the garden. Mrs. Leith brightened visibly, and Matilda seemed to have renewed her youth (though not her temper, Archie said). As for Archie, he was in the seventh heaven.

And no one at all suspected Uncle Wilham to be the direct cause of it all! He got his money's worth, he told Peggy, for it was a source of infinite joy to him to do a good turn to any one without getting found out.

It was in July that something of great moment happened. The widow of a knight took a house at a little distance from that occupied by the Rattens. Lady Winston's husband had also been a tradesman, and had been knighted on the occasion of a royal

visit to the town in which he had made his money, and of which he was then Mayor.

Millicent Ratten was one of the first to call on Lady Winston. Her mother, of course, accompanied her, but as a sort of appendage. Millicent was intoxicated with vain-glory. At last there would be a titled lady at the 'Ratten Receptions.'

Millicent went to make her call in the *dernier cri* of costumes, and determined to ingratiate herself at any cost. Poor Mrs. Ratten had been well drilled for the occasion by her ambitious daughter. Mrs. Ratten was to talk very little so as to hide (so far as possible) defects of speech. She was to 'smile pleasantly,' and be 'monosyllabic.'

Great was Millicent's astonishment and discomfiture to find Mrs. Higginbotham already 'in possession' of the titled lady! More than this, the two seemed to be on such very intimate terms that it was not possible to suppose they were meeting for the first time.

Lady Winston illuminated the situation by saying that Mrs. Higginbotham was her sole reason for coming to live at Dulwich. 'She is my aunt, you see, Miss Ratten, and the dearest friend I have into the bargain!'

Mrs. Higginbotham as the aunt of a titled

personage became transfigured in Millicent's eyes. She must conciliate this peppery old lady at any cost.

'Mrs. Higginbotham has quite won the heart of a little Canadian cousin of ours, Lady Winston,' Millicent said, with a smile in the old lady's direction, and a purposeful pleading in her eyes.

'H'm!' ejaculated Lady Winston's aunt. 'Peggy is the only young Ratten I know with a heart to give. There is no nonsense about Peggy. She never puts her nose into the air. I like her.'

This characteristically disagreeable speech was followed by an interval of deadly silence. Lady Winston smoothed the situation by laughing softly and seeming to regard her aunt's remark as merely a joke. Then tea came, and caused a diversion. Mrs. Ratten, who was trying her best to smile, according to orders, succeeded only in grimacing. More callers arrived, and the Rattens cut their call very short. Millicent was anxious to get away on her own account, but more so on her mother's, for she saw that Mrs. Ratten was on the verge of tears. Poor lady! Company manners were a terrible strain on her at the best of times; and the acid attitude of Mrs. Higginbotham was the last straw.

But Millicent was, as we have said, intoxicated by the rich draught to her vanity in store. Vanity, which had been more or less attenuated up to now for want of sufficient food, leapt into a consuming flame at the idea of having a lady of title on their visiting list. The blaze of glory blinded her to her mother's condition, to Mrs. Hugginbotham's antagonism, to all the glaring drawbacks to her personal shining which hitherto had so embittered her. Being ignorant of the roads to high places, she now had visions of presentation at court. Nothing that her ambition craved seemed out of reach now that she knew a lady of title. That this particular lady of title was not to the manner born did not matter. From to-day Millicent's besetting sin of vanity dominated her, and, like the ill-weed it was, threatened to choke all the fair flowers that would have bloomed in her nature. Vanity is a disease which some take mildly; but in other cases it is nothing less horrible than a cancerous growth. The victim of the disease of vanity in this form becomes cruel. To trample underfoot those who are near, and should be dear, counts as nothing, if these people stand in the way of the royal progress. Good and generous impulses die

the death. Vanity can become an insatiable appetite, a thirst that the biggest draughts of flattery fail to quench.

Millicent, on the way back from Lady Winston's, conceived the idea of her mother's adopting the rôle of 'nervous invalid' and so keeping to her room when there was entertaining or visiting to be done. As to her father, he happily kept out of all this kind of thing from choice. She knew she could 'handle' her mother. Mrs. Ratten was in fear and trembling of offending Millicent's tastes. The burthen of trying to live up to Millicent's ideas was already breaking her nerves. She felt very tired, very sick of the eternal pretence. Yet she had been ambitious too, in her own way. She did not blame Millicent. She knew in a vague sort of fashion that had she had the advantage of Millicent's education she would have been much like her. She sympathized with Millicent's views, and deep down resented her own absence of chance. She was a bitterly disappointed woman in many ways. To see her daughter an acknowledged society woman would compensate for a good deal; but she herself must only be an onlooker. It was not a rôle she would have chosen to play.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CUP OF HUMILIATION

At last there was to be a garden party on a truly grand scale at Buckingham House.

A special band of musicians had been engaged in London to perform at intervals. The marquee in which refreshments were served was hired for the occasion. The refreshments themselves Millicent insisted on having sent down from Buzzard's. The marquee was garlanded inside with pink roses. Millicent was queening it to perfection in an exquisite white gown (which had not come from the Peckham emporium); Mrs. Ratten was 'nursing a headache'—oh! nothing alarming!—in her own room. Fanny and Peggy were beautifully dressed, and both a little glum if the truth must be told; for Millicent had written to Mr. Fitzgerald to the effect that Archie was to be left at home, as this reception was not going to be spoiled by any white rats.

It was a gay assembly, and a large one, for had not Millicent written on her invitation cards, 'To meet Lady Winston'?

Lady Winston was there, very gracious and exquisitely gowned, though in black, which she had always worn since the death of her husband. Lady Winston's aunt—Mrs. Higginbotham—was also there, wearing a quaker-like bonnet, a corded grey silk dress, and a black lace shawl which, Pamela Bennum-Bright declared in a stage whisper to her dear Millicent, 'had come out of the ark.' Pamela's own gown and hat had evidently emanated from that famous firm known in two continents as the one firm where a woman's dress has become a fine art.

Nothing like this garden fête had ever been seen before at Dulwich village.

Millicent, as hostess, was regal. She was intoxicated with the wine of vanity.

On a terrace, under silken awnings, sat Lady Winston, Mrs. Higginbotham, and certain of the elect. On the green stretch of lawn in front of them tennis was in progress. Millicent moved about among her guests, giving smiles and pretty speeches, receiving new-comers, and seeing to their needs. High-and-mighty servants served dainty refreshments in the daintiest of cups and crystal.

The sun shone gloriously out of the bluest of blue skies, where little filmy white clouds moved leisurely. The tinnest of playful breezes toyed with the trees and the flowers.

Then a bomb exploded.

It was not a real bomb, oh, no ! but quite as effective in a moral sense.

There suddenly appeared upon the scene two women and a little girl. The women wore hats of a type that may be seen any gala day on a village green. Their coats and skirts were of some ill-cut cheap fabric. The coats were open, and exposed to view blouses that 'shouted.' The little girl's white frock was soiled and dragged by a railway journey.

The incongruous trio advanced towards the terrace, from round the side of the house.

Peggy caught sight of them, and raced up with cries of joy, embracing each in turn.

'Millicent !' she called to the stately slim figure which stood near, transfixed with surprise and wrath. 'This is Mrs. Sweeny, that brought me over ; and this is Mrs. Pickrell, and little Ada. That is my Cousin Millicent you've heard about way back home, Mrs. Sweeny.'

'I've sure heard of you, Miss Ratten,' said Mrs. Sweeny, extending a gloveless

red hand in friendliness, while she beamed good-naturedly. 'Me and Mrs. Pickrell and little Ada have to go back home next week—sooner than we thought for—so we figured we'd come and see Peggy and all of you. You seem to have a grand surprise-party on! Well, we'll make three more, only we haven't brought any lunch-baskets, not knowing. You see, way back home we all sure know when there's going to be a surprise-party, and——'

Mrs. Sweeny suddenly stopped. She had become aware at last that her extended hand was not going to receive any hearty Canadian grasp, or any at all. She was silently bewildered at first, till Milboent said: 'Go round to the kitchen, my good people, and the servants will attend to you, and give you tea.'

With that she turned her back and walked away, raging with humiliation and anger.

Peggy's eyes flashed fire. Her cheeks were crimson. She linked her arm in that of Mrs. Sweeny and took little Ada by the hand, leading them away, followed by Mrs. Pickrell, who was trembling visibly. One of the servants—it was Dane—followed the dejected party, and said, 'Never you mind, Miss Margaret! Your friends shall have the best

of everything. I'll see to that!' and muttered something under her breath about 'snobs' and 'upstarts.'

Peggy dropped Ada's hand, and laid her own on her breast to find comfort in feeling the little bag of dollar bills. Then she said, 'You're sure kind, Dane; but you don't know us! My friends won't touch food here; and, Dane, I shall go back with them. The house where my friends are treated like this, I sure can't stay in longer than it takes to pack!'

Then came another surprise, and the last straw of humiliation for Milcent.

Lady Winston had come down from the terrace, and had walked swiftly after Peggy's retreating party. 'Peggy,' she said in a voice that could be heard far, 'will your friends give me the pleasure of entertaining them? I should be both proud and glad. My car will be round in a moment, and there is room for you all, if you squeeze a little. I am going now, and I may say I shall never enter this house again. Come!—all of you—*I beg!*'

Lady Winston looked so kind, and so really friendly, that her invitation was accepted. Mrs. Higginbotham and several others took their leave too.

CHAPTER XXIV

'THE FRAISIE EVERY TIME'

'I TELL you what it is, mother!' thundered Uncle William, who had just received a full account of the reception meted out to Peggy's friends from Fanny. 'I tell you what it is, mother, I'm going to put a stop to all this tomfoolery once and for all. I'm getting about fed up with Millicent's highy-tighty ways. We've got a big house, and no home, you and me! I've put up with a lot; but I won't stand Peggy's friends being insulted. I invited them to come here, and the house is mine. I'm going round to Lady Winston's to tell them all what I think about it. Disgraceful, cruel treatment, I call it!'

'So do I,' sobbed Mrs. Ratten; 'and—and—Millicent says I'm to keep out of the way at parties and such like—I don't talk right, and——'

'I'll talk right, I can tell you, when I see Millicent!' broke in Uncle William.

'I'm one of the sort that takes a lot of rousing. I put up with a lot before I set up a kick! But Milly's done the trick this time. I shall close up this place and we'll all go to live over the shop at Peckham. There's heaps of rooms and a fine kitchen, where the food is cooked for the assistants. The only thing that will break down Milly's wicked pride is to have to live over the shop. She'll have to give up that car of hers, too! I'll have no more swanking around!'

'I'll be glad to go for one!' Mrs. Ratten declared; 'I'm getting I can hardly breathe 'ere.'

Uncle William removed his coat, and marched up and down his wife's bedroom, where, as we know, she had been incarcerated by her daughter with a fictional headache.

'Nice thing it will be for my brother John to hear, when they all get back to Canada! Well, he shall hear what I think of it! I suppose I've been to blame giving way to such a lot of fool-show. I've liked to see my children happy, and I've said to myself, 'What's the good of all the money if not to make the children happy? I was wrong. I've injured Milly's character by letting her feed her vanity with my money. She's got lots of good in her, and vanity will kill

the lot of it if I don't put my foot down firm: and I will!'

'I hope you won't be too rough on Milly,' pleaded the mother. 'She's fair knocked flat as it is, with Lady Winston doing what she did. She don't want much more. I'm to blame too. I wanted a fine 'ouse: but I don't want no more! I want a 'ome, that's what I want.'

'You shall have it, mother,' her husband told her. 'You shall have a nice little house that one servant can work, when we've been over the shop a bit, to bring Milly's pride down. Why, it's pride that loses more souls than any other sin, I do believe. It made Milly cruel, and she is a generous-hearted girl if pride didn't master her! It was pride that turned Satan out of heaven. Now I'm going to find Milly and get it over.'

'Don't be too hard, father,' again begged his wife.

Millicent was face-downward on her bed in all her finery, sobbing her heart out, when her father found her. Her humiliation was complete. The sight of her moved her tender-hearted father to compassion.

'Milk, old girl,' said her father gently, 'look up, and let us face things together.

Bad as all this is, it can bring good if it teaches my little daughter to trample underfoot the sin of pride, and to nourish those sweet qualities which she has let vanity cover up and smother.'

Millicent flung her arms round her father's neck, and sobbed upon his breast.

'I have been a horrid girl!' she broke out hysterically; 'but—but—I have had my lesson. I never, never want any parties or anything again!'

Then she became calmer, and father and daughter had a heart-to-heart talk.

'I can never look any one in the face again,' said Millicent drearily.

'Oh, yes, you can,' answered her father, 'because you will live all this folly down. You will have the courage to go and tell Peggy and her friends what you now think of your conduct. You will go with us cheerfully to live over the shop for a time, and afterwards into a nice, simple home. Oh, all this is necessary, Milly. Pride is a hardy weed, and wants a lot of killing! If you willingly and cheerfully do all this, you will build up for yourself a fine character. You can never find happiness any other way. Vain show, vain glory, never bring anything but disappointment and unhappiness. Sail

under your true colours. Never try to appear what you are not, little girl. Now, what have you to say ?'

'That you are the dearest dad in the world !' she cried, kissing him ; 'and that from now I am going to try hard to be a worthy daughter.'

'There's my own girl !' he said, adding, 'good will come out of all this pain.'

Together father and daughter went to Lady Winston's, where they found her giving a meat tea to Peggy and her friends. No servants were present. Lady Winston and Mrs. Higginbotham were waiting on the visitors.

Mr. Ratten spoke first. 'My girl has come to apologize,' he said.

'I should think so !' remarked Lady Winston icily. 'If you had been present, Mr. Ratten, all this would have been prevented.'

'I never witnessed such a disgraceful scene in all my life,' put in Mrs. Higginbotham.

Tears were running down Millicent's cheeks.

'She's crying !' exclaimed little Ada, jumping down from her seat and running up to Millicent. 'Stoop down, and I'll sure kiss the tears away !'

Millicent caught the golden-haired little girl in her arms, and hugged her. 'You are a forgiving little angel!' she said; 'and I am a horrid girl; but I'm not going to be horrid any more.'

These words won forgiveness from the kindly Canadians at once. Peggy came and kissed her cousin, murmuring something no one but Millicent heard.

Mrs. Sweeny and Mrs. Pickrell both said kindly things. But Lady Winston and Mrs. Higginbotham would not unfreeze. Mrs. Higginbotham had many old scores of her own to pay off. She heartily disliked Miss Ratten.

Up to now there had been no greeting between Mr. Ratten and the Canadian women. He now came up to them and shook hands, and begged them to stay at his house till they sailed.

'Please, please do!' pleaded Millicent; 'if only to show you forgive me! I shall never forgive myself!'

Mrs. Sweeny beamed her kindest. 'We'll sure come,' she said, glancing at Mrs. Pickrell, who nodded several times in succession; 'and I hope you'll all come over and see us way back home. The crossing's nothing, and we'll be real glad to have you all.'

'And come on to me at Vancouver,' put in Mrs. Pickrell, 'and you shall sure have some of the finest layer-cakes in all Canada !'

'And a wride on a bullock,' put in little Ada.

'We may take you at your word,' said Lady Winston. 'I am going a voyage round the world, and can come back that way, and my aunt will come with me.'

'I shall come out to see my brother, and will pay you both a visit,' said Uncle Wilham.

'Oh, I am so glad !' cried Peggy ; 'for I shall want to see you in the worst way, Uncle Wilham, for you know I am going back to Canada with Mrs. Sweeny, and Mrs. Pickrell, and little Ada, and old Bounce.'

'We shall miss you sadly, Peggy,' her uncle told her. 'It has been a short visit you have made us, but I know you will do well to go. You'll be happier in Canada. I know you have been home-sick, child !'

'You have all been so kind to me, and I'll sure remember it always,' said Peggy ; 'and I'll miss you all, and think about you every day. But I'll like to be in the prairie again, Uncle Wilham. I'm not denying that. It is beautiful, oh, yes, quite beautiful in England—but, give me the prairie every

time! I want to herd the cows again, and milk, and make butter, and do the chores with Jo. Guess doing nothing all day isn't what I'm used to. I want work in the worst way.'

Peggy spoke rapidly. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes shining.

Millicent's face had grown very white. She was longing to escape to her room. Her father saw it, and carried her off. The others were to follow.

When Peggy and Bounce came round to the hay pile they found Fanny and Archie there in the depths of gloom. They had been sure Peggy would come here with Bounce.

'I say, Peg, it is rotten that you are going away!' said Archie.

'It's simply beastly!' sniffed Fanny; 'and it's all Milly's fault!'

'Everybody's coming to Canada to see us,' said Peggy cheerfully. 'You two have got to come too.'

'I wish I could come now,' grumbled Archie. 'I'd much rather work on a farm with Jo than learn beastly Latin and algebra.'

'I'll ask Uncle William to bring you both,' Peggy said consolingly. 'I figure he will, for he is so kind, and has lots of money. Gee! won't we have a fine time!'

'I shall hunt Indians,' pronounced Archie;
'and I might shoot a moose!'

Peggy smiled.

Mr Ratten resolved to go to Liverpool to see the party off, and took Archie and Fanny with him.

There were tearful farewells on the landing-stage; requests and promises innumerable. Then the big liner moved away majestically down the Mersey; and those on shore watched till they could no longer see the waving handkerchief of Peggy.

'I forgot to say good-bye to Bounce,' said Fanny.

'I wish I had given my white rat to Peggy,' said Archie regretfully.



